

# Nineteen Eighty-Nine

*Down and Out with Conant and Rorty*

**Are Reichelt Føreland**



Thesis submitted for the Master's Degree in Philosophy,  
Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas

Supervisor: Bjørn Torgrim Ramberg

**UNIVERSITETET I OSLO**

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## Introduction

Richard Rorty's views on truth and objectivity have been broadly criticized for promoting intellectual irresponsibility, and have often been ridiculed for their dismissal of metaphysical or epistemological considerations. On the other hand, Rorty's decades-long engagement in discussions of metaphysical and epistemological views has led to charges that he, contrary to his own claim that he is working to loosen the grip of entrenched metaphysical intuitions, must indeed be proposing such a view of his own. Such charges have most commonly included those of proposing some form of idealism, verificationism or relativism. Thus we can say that, on the one hand, Rorty has been criticized for proposing some form of outdated foundationalism for truth and knowledge, and that, on the other hand, he has been charged with failing to supply the foundations without which we are left with no way of distinguishing truth from falsity, knowledge from opinion, and rational argument from indoctrination.

James Conant's "Freedom, Cruelty, and Truth: Rorty Versus Orwell"<sup>1</sup> brings forward both sets of criticisms, while simultaneously using George Orwell's *1984*<sup>2</sup> as a poignant illustration of the counter-intuitive nature of Rorty's anti-foundational views. It is the aim of this essay to use Rorty's and Conant's discussions of *1984* as a means to explicating their respective views on truth and objectivity. Conant's is a sincere attempt at charity toward Rorty, and should therefore be a good starting point for a fruitful discussion. Nevertheless, Conant aims to show how Orwell's novel precisely brings out the problems inherent in Rorty's proposals that we stop talking about the usual metaphysical suspects and that the most important historical contributions to philosophy have been made through redescription rather than through arriving at truer descriptions of an external reality, or the like. Importantly, Conant claims that Rorty's suggestions that we stop making typically philosophical assumptions about words like "truth" and "knowledge" – e.g., that a sentence is true if and only if it stands in a suitable representational relation to the world – or, as Conant sometimes suggests is claimed, that we stop using this vocabulary altogether, deprives us of the necessary resources for continuing to

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<sup>1</sup> Conant, James: "Freedom, Cruelty, and Truth: Rorty Versus Orwell", in Brandom, Robert B. (ed.): *Rorty and His Critics* (Blackwell Publishing, 2000) (hereafter *RHC*)

<sup>2</sup> Orwell, George: *1984* (Plume, 1983)

talk about, e.g., democracy and freedom, two things that it is in the highest interest of both Rorty and Conant to preserve and develop.

It is perhaps curious that two philosophers, whose goals for philosophizing coincide to such a large extent, nevertheless come to disagree so fundamentally as Conant and Rorty do. Taking its cue from this curiosity, it is a main strategy of this essay to trace the priorities or goals of the two philosophers, as well as what they take to be necessary for reaching those goals. As is already apparent, they share many of the same goals – in particular, the preservation, development and extension of democracy and freedom – but differ widely as regards the question of the requirements for reaching those goals. While Conant accuses Rorty of depriving us of necessary discursive resources for reaching certain goals, Rorty refuses to recognize any such relation of necessity, and instead emphasizes the ever-evolving, interdependent nature of the relationship between human interests and goals and the ways in which we come to find it best to talk about, satisfy and reach them. Rorty's emphasis is based on a view of human beings as complex natural creatures coping with their environment, with no transcendental abilities such as that of representing the word accurately. Conant agrees that we should not subscribe to any metaphysical doctrine, but wants to establish a position that, while making room for the interest relativity of truth, nevertheless allows for necessary connections between vocabularies and the things he aims to preserve.

Several of the charges against Rorty, it will be argued, are based on unfortunate misconstruals of his views. Furthermore, it will be argued that Conant, while accusing Rorty of presenting Orwell's intentions for the novel as coinciding with Rorty's own construal of it, is the one exploiting *1984* as a means to underwriting his own position. This strategy, arguably, not only assumes a lot about Orwell's own intentions, but does little towards actually underwriting Conant's position.

This brings out two main lines of thought for the present essay. First, I hope to show that by keeping three things – the different authors' intentions, what positions they assume their writings underwrite, and which (perhaps) unintended background assumptions they make –

clearly apart, we will be able to sketch a better picture of the disagreement between Conant and Rorty. This, in turn, will serve as the springboard for an explication of the point of view from which Rorty launches his reading of *1984*, a reading which, rather than seeking a faithful interpretation of Orwell's intentions, aims to present what a pragmatist such as himself gets out of the novel.

A few words on the structure of the essay. While we will focus extensively on the debate between Conant and Rorty, we will also draw on the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein and, especially, Hilary Putnam, in order to clarify Conant's position. Significant space is given to the discussion of the two latter philosophers' views, in the hope of providing a broad background of various positions ranging from metaphysical realism to Rorty's antirepresentationalism. It has been an aim of the essay to make plausible Rorty's position based on a rather broad selection of his central views, as the interaction with Rorty often tends to be both very focused (and heated), but also because Conant's paper attempts to do the same and thus deserves that a similar approach be taken in a response to it.

Returning often to the key idea of representation, and the struggle between the insistence on a representational notion of truth and the suggestion that we drop such a notion altogether, we will seek to undermine confidence in the intuitive necessity of the representational assumption, and end with a prospect for how a thoroughly antirepresentationalist account may be pursued, and what the advantages of pursuing such an account might be.

A note on the title: The title and subtitle both play with titles of books by George Orwell. The main title speaks for itself as to the inspiration from Orwell, while 1989 is the year Rorty's interpretation of *1984* was published. The subtitle is inspired by Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*. The titles are meant to indicate the hopefully both broad and sufficiently deep scope of the undertaking to substantiate the antirepresentationalist position.

## 1. 1984

George Orwell's novel *1984* is widely read and needs little introduction. Furthermore, necessary details of the story will be provided during the course of the text. Let it therefore suffice to note that *1984* describes a dystopian, totalitarian future society in which "the Party" has gained complete control over the inhabitants of its society. While the masses are kept in something like a Pavlovian controlled state, Party members have more freedoms but are continually working to carry out the purposes of the Party. These purposes seem to be driven by rather simple megalomaniacal concerns, but the part of particular importance for the present essay regards the methods the Party uses to further its causes, develop its society and break resistance. These practices will be detailed in connection with their respective discussions below. The overall discussion about them concerns the implications these practices have for truth, rationality, and related notions. Does the main character Winston's submitting to the force of the Party at the end of the novel imply the "loss of truth"? This and related questions will take center stage throughout the essay.

## 2. Rorty's Interpretation

In his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*<sup>3</sup>, Richard Rorty presents an unusual interpretation of *1984*, where he attempts to view the book through his pragmatist lense. This has led to both furious responses and careful critiques. An example of the latter is provided by James Conant in his contribution to *Rorty and His Critics*, and the exchange between Conant and Rorty is the main focus of this text. We will need to refer to those two books for further information, but the central claims will naturally be presented in due course throughout the essay. Let us begin with some of Conant's construals of Rorty's views, first of all the claim that Rorty's essay on *1984* represents an attempt to view Orwell as agreeing with his own, pragmatist views.

## 3. Orwell as a Rortian

Let us begin with a claim attributed to Rorty by Conant which represents a straightforward, yet perfectly understandable, misunderstanding. This misunderstanding in and of itself is not

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<sup>3</sup> Rorty, Richard: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) (hereafter *CIS*)

of particular importance, but is significant in that it leads up to a number of other central charges. The claim in question is that Rorty interprets the message Orwell intends to convey in *1984* as consisting in the insistence that truth is not a concept of particular importance, and that it is freedom which plays the central role in the novel – in short, Rorty attempts to put forward an interpretation of Orwell in which he is portrayed as agreeing with Rortian views. “Rorty denies both on his own and on Orwell’s behalf that there is an intimate connection between freedom and truth. [...] According to Rorty’s Orwell, if we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself.”<sup>4</sup>

In the chapter on Orwell in *CIS*, there are passages which could be construed as supporting this reading. Nevertheless Rorty, in his “Reply to James Conant”<sup>5</sup> in *RHC*, explicitly denies having ever wanted Orwell on his side in a philosophical argument, and that his aim was rather “to explain why one could be a non-Realist and still have one’s moral horizon expanded by *1984*”<sup>6</sup>. So, Conant is wrong in assuming that Rorty interprets Orwell in the aforementioned way, and yet this last quote implies something about Rorty’s view which Conant picks up and develops further. If Rorty is offering a non-realist reading of the novel which purports to go against the intentions of Orwell, then presumably, though not necessarily, a more faithful interpretation would hold that Orwell wrote from a fundamentally realist standpoint. At least this is implied in Rorty’s formulation, and indeed he believes that Orwell intuitively assumes a realist outlook. As he says, “[had] Orwell taken an interest in such [philosophical] arguments, I imagine, he would have sided with the Realists.”<sup>7</sup> So, it should be clear that Rorty is not attempting to enlist Orwell in his cause by making it appear as if *1984* explicitly endorses Rortian views or views closely related to these.

In fact, it appears that Orwell was not especially interested in constructing philosophical arguments. As Rorty puts it, Orwell “had no taste for such arguments, or skill at constructing them, than did Nabokov.”<sup>8</sup> Conant makes the case that Orwell in writing *1984* was rather

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<sup>4</sup> Conant, 310

<sup>5</sup> Rorty, Richard: “Reply to James Conant”, in *RHC*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 344

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *CIS*, 173



concerned to warn of the totalitarian tendencies he saw as developing and spreading dangerously among intellectuals in contemporary Britain.<sup>9</sup> Conant and Rorty would agree that *1984* first and foremost has such a practical concern, but the way they account for this concern differs widely, and is in need of clarification. We will argue, with Rorty, that in fact it is Conant who seeks to enlist Orwell on his side in a philosophical argument, and that it is Conant's mistaken diagnosis of epistemologism that leads him to think of Rorty as doing the same. That is not to say that Rorty does not spend a significant amount of time talking about metaphysical issues, but rather to suggest that this engagement is better viewed as resulting from the belief that this is the best strategy for showing the futility of such questions, and for loosening the grip of realist intuitions. Their two differing views on the implications of Orwell's vocabulary in *1984* will be a main concern in what follows. As we are here concerned with Conant's construals of Rorty's views, let us first look at how Rorty's supposed obsession with epistemological and metaphysical issues is presented.

The obsession, according to Conant, first and foremost results in an inability to see the possibility that the use of a typically realist vocabulary does not necessarily imply a commitment to realist theses. He takes it that Rorty's concern with undermining the importance of the concept of truth in the novel reveals a belief that the "truth or falsity of a metaphysical thesis"<sup>10</sup> is a central concern of *1984*. Accusing Rorty of such obsessional epistemologism, Conant goes on to claim that Rorty "fails to see the intervening intellectual options"<sup>11</sup> between metaphysically pregnant views and the view that all use of philosophical argument can amount to no more than mere rhetoric.

Two separate claims must be distinguished at this point. The first is the claim that Rorty, obsessed with metaphysical questions, is unable to see how a typically realist vocabulary can serve metaphysically innocent purposes which are nevertheless not mere rhetoric, or a mere attempt at redescription of events. The second claim consists in the implicit assumption about Rorty's view: that he thinks realist vocabulary can only be used either for metaphysically

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<sup>9</sup> See e.g., Conant, 330 (note 120)

<sup>10</sup> Conant, 283

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

significant purposes or be mere rhetoric. Or, rather, the use of the vocabulary is always only *intended* in one of these two ways, and Rorty is blind to other ways in which authors might intend to use it. The first claim leads Conant to attempt to show how an intermediate position is possible, while the following background assumption serves as a motivation for plotting that position. While arguing against the latter assumption will do little directly towards undermining the perceived need for an intermediate position, it is nevertheless necessary to give a more nuanced presentation of Rorty's view of philosophical argument in order to avoid the misleading impression created by Conant.

In effect, Conant ascribes to Rorty the view that whenever an author makes significant use of the realist vocabulary, he must either be concerned to defend a metaphysical thesis, or the vocabulary in itself is mere rhetoric used only for redescriptive purposes. As regards *1984*, Conant takes it that Rorty understands "the novel as primarily concerned to offer a description of Soviet Russia"<sup>12</sup> and "takes its concern to be with freedom rather than truth".<sup>13</sup> Rorty is here thus portrayed as making a claim about *Orwell's intentions* – that Orwell was concerned to uphold the importance of freedom as distinguished from truth, and that he intended to offer a redescription of Soviet Russia.

Conant reaches this conclusion on the basis of Rorty's supposed view of philosophical theorizing "as an intrinsically barren and ineffectual activity."<sup>14</sup> He goes on from this to claim that precisely because the oppressing strategies detailed in *1984* are so effective, Rorty concludes that what is happening cannot involve (necessarily ineffectual) philosophical theorizing. However, this characterization is not only mistaken with respect to Rorty's opinions about *1984*, it also fails to draw a clear line between the intentions of the author and the philosophical views that are actually up for debate. We will later argue that Conant is the one who in the end enlists Orwell on his side of a philosophical argument, thus attributing to Orwell a view which on our reading of the novel does not suit him well, and that he seems to do this partly based on a failure to recognize that while Orwell may not explicitly endorse any

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 329 (note 116)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 282 (italics removed)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 292

philosophical views, it might still be legitimate to attribute to him implicit realist views. Thus, on the one hand, Orwell's intentions for his text do not in themselves imply anything about the validity of any explicit or implicit philosophical views, and on the other hand, the lack of explicitly voiced philosophical views does not imply that the text cannot be interpreted as expressing such views implicitly. While this last point could be deemed speculative, we will argue that an ascription of perfectly commonsensical realist views fits Orwell better than what we will characterize as Conant's enlisting of Orwell in his own Wittgensteinian "ordinary language" position. Let us now look more closely at the relationship between the author's intentions and the various philosophical views, and separate the two clearly, in order to get a clearer picture of which problems we must face and which might be deemed less important.

It might be best to sort out the latter problems to begin with. The first thing we might safely leave by the wayside is the formerly mentioned claim attributed to Rorty that because Orwell "is evidently concerned with tactics which can wreak profound and very concrete transformations"<sup>15</sup> he cannot be concerned with philosophical theorizing. Rorty does not hold this view. Doing so would already be implying that Orwell was sympathetic to Rortian views, in that the claim implies an agreement with the view that all philosophical theorizing is ineffectual, and we assume that it has been shown that Rorty does not take Orwell to agree with his basic views. (Importantly, this should not be taken to imply that we are here given a good presentation of Rorty's view of philosophical theorizing, but this will be clarified later. In short, it is not that the activity of philosophical theorizing is inherently ineffectual, but rather that, in the cases where this activity is indeed effective, it is not the specifically philosophical assumptions about the truth of a theory which explains the effectiveness.) In fact, as has been mentioned, Rorty rather holds that if Orwell could be incited to make explicit in which direction his philosophical sympathies lay, he would probably have come close to a straightforwardly realist position.

So, Rorty clearly does not think that Orwell cannot be interested in putting forward philosophical claims. Nevertheless, this is a separate question from that of whether Orwell in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 292

fact is doing so in his novel. Is Orwell concerned to defend philosophical theses, realist or otherwise? That is an interesting question with regard to the discussion at hand, because on the face of it, as the already referred-to lack of interest in such questions seems to show, Orwell is not. Even so, the vocabulary of *1984* is often decidedly philosophical, and this complicates the matter somewhat. Orwell says that the consequence of the introduction of a totalitarian form of government is that “the very concept of objective truth begins to fade out of the world”<sup>16</sup>. In the novel, Winston says that “[being] in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad [... Winston] fell asleep murmuring ‘Sanity is not statistical,’ with the feeling that this remark contained in it a profound wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

The quotes reveal a belief in objective truth in some form or other. The question remains in what sense this is to be understood. Does it amount to an outright realist belief in external, language-independent truth? Is the focus rather intended to be on the *concept* of objective truth, in the sense of a concept the competency of use through which we might reach some sort of objectivity? Rorty and Conant – the latter here inspired by the work of Hilary Putnam and Ludwig Wittgenstein – take their interpretation of these remarks in different directions, and the results are instructive to our discussion. Let us begin with Rorty’s interpretation.

#### **4. Rorty and Realism**

Rorty takes it that Orwell, had he had any interest in subscribing to any specifically philosophical position, would come out a straightforward realist. He assumes that when Orwell speaks of the concept of objective truth fading out of the world, what he means is that through the introduction of oppressive totalitarian practices, e.g. systematically forcing people to believe that two plus two equals five, we lose touch with a language-independent external truth about the world as such, a connection retained in the non-totalitarian state.

A thoroughly realist position, it must be specified, holds that “*a*, *b*, and *c* and so on exist, and the fact that they exist and have properties such as *F-ness*, *G-ness*, and *H-ness* is [...]”

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 310

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 304

independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on”<sup>18</sup>. We see that there are two aspects involved in this position, namely *existence* and *independence*. Realism thus amounts to both the claim that certain things exist and the claim that facts about these things are independent of linguistic practices. Not only is the external world itself acknowledged as existing, but there is no sense in which language plays a constituting role in the structure of the world either. It is simply the world itself, and by itself, which makes our sentences true, and we can only seek to let the world's constraints guide our belief-formation in our various linguistic and other practices.

Does this realist position fit Orwell's remarks? Winston's statement above does indeed seem to chime with these ideas. The remark “there was truth and untruth” calls on the idea of truth as external to human practices. So does “sanity is not statistical”, and this latter remark might be said to support the independence aspect of the realist position as well. For if the correctness of *descriptions* of the external world are not determined by human practices, specifically, let us say, a prevailing consensus in a certain society or social group of authority, then presumably the external world itself takes care of the correctness of descriptions, too.

All of this seemingly gives support to Rorty's belief that Orwell would probably side with the realists. Yet, is there not a sense in which the above remarks leave the possibility that human practices play a determining role for truth-values open? As regards Winston's statement, both the claim that there is external truth and that this is not a statistical matter are still compatible with a position where, although a *consensus* in itself does not determine truth-values, human practices might still have a contributing role. This is corroborated by the former remark about the concept of objective truth fading out of the world, a remark which, if one accentuates the conceptual part, reveals that it might be the competency in the use of a certain concept – a specifically human ability – that is claimed to be lost. Both of the above quotes taken together could be interpreted as saying that there is a way the world is, completely independent of human practices, but that certain concepts or vocabularies ensure our access to the truths

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<sup>18</sup> Miller, Alexander: “Realism”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism/>

about the external world, while the undermining and removal of these vocabularies would deprive us of the only means to such access.

Although we will not uphold any firm conclusions about Orwell's underlying philosophical views, this latter stance is the one taken by Conant in his portrayal of Orwell. We will argue that Conant takes Orwell to agree with his own philosophical position, at least on some central points. This might be seen to be reading a lot into Orwell's realist-sounding remarks, but as the above discussion hopefully shows there is at least a way to read Orwell as differing from the realist position and as being implicitly more sympathetic to the anti-realist who would "concede the existence dimension but reject the independence dimension" of the realist view.

However, at least one ambiguity remains, and it concerns the way in which the independence dimension is rejected. The ambiguity amounts to a distinction between the view that human practices contribute in making up truth-values and the view that certain human practices only give access to truths about the world. On the former view, what is true is inseparable from human practices not only because those practices make it possible for us to make true statements, but in the sense that truth is partly *made up* by the contributions of our practices, while on the latter view the inseparability amounts to the claim that only through certain practices, e.g., through the use of certain vocabularies, is it possible for us to access, or at least move in the direction of, truth.

The first view appears to be equivalent to some form of idealism wherein a human component, be it thought or some social practice, in part determines truth. This is not a desirable position for a realist who insists on the independence of the external world, and facts about the external world, from language. Conant insists that his position differs significantly from Realism, of course, and in fact we have already hinted that his position might be better described as anti-realist. It is nevertheless important to distinguish anti-realism from idealism, as the former would claim that, although our access to knowledge of the external world is not independent of language or other human practices, *what is accessed* is the external world

itself as independent of, say, language. On the other hand idealism, very generally described, holds that what is accessed cannot be separated from our means of access and that the latter is thereby an essential component of the former. So, the anti-realist still maintains the independence of external reality, and looks for a way of securing access to objective knowledge about it.<sup>19</sup>

Conant apparently holds – and in large part ascribes to Orwell – the latter, anti-realist view. At this point we will leave the question of Orwell’s intentions alone, as making further claims about his own, unpronounced possible views would be too speculative. Conant is naturally much more explicit as to the view he attributes to Orwell – or the position the possibility of which he at least accuses Rorty of ignoring that *1984* might support – and it will be more instructive to take a closer look at this view. The view is one inspired by Hilary Putnam’s internal realism, which has been described as a “synthesis of anti-realism and metaphysical realism”<sup>20</sup>, and both Conant and Putnam are furthermore inspired by Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>21</sup>. Before moving on to present these views, let us put the issue of Orwell’s own philosophical intentions and the quarrel over who is looking to have Orwell on his side in a philosophical argument to rest.

As mentioned, Rorty explicitly says that he is not imagining that Orwell would agree with his philosophical views. He does, however, say somewhat ambiguous things like, “[Orwell] does not view O’Brien as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and *possible*.”<sup>22</sup> Orwell certainly manages to convince us that O’Brien *is* dangerous and possible, and it would seem that this is a more important concern of Orwell’s than that of defending any philosophical position. At the same time, philosophical claims such as that “the very concept of objective truth begins to fade out of the world” cannot be simply ignored. I think it useful to distinguish Orwell’s practical concern to warn against the society we could end up with if we allow totalitarian thoughts to

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<sup>19</sup> The sense of “truth” above is left unclear, and forms of knowledge have not as yet been distinguished from truth. These points will hopefully be clarified in the later presentation and discussion of Conant’s own view.

<sup>20</sup> Moretti, Luca: “Putnam’s Internal Realism”, Ph.D. in philosophy, King’s College London, 13

<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Philosophical Investigations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) (hereafter *PI*)

<sup>22</sup> *CIS*, 176

take hold from the way he sometimes describes what would be wrong with such a society. That is, apart from the obvious oppression and harsh control prevailing, how he describes what is wrong in philosophical terms. While the practical concern with the lack of freedom might well be the most important, Orwell does hold that what, in a more fundamental way, goes wrong in the society of *1984* is that people lose hold of the concept of objective truth. However, nothing about the validity of such a philosophically charged claim follows from the fact that Orwell describes things in this way. Let us therefore take care to keep these two issues apart.

At this point it becomes clear that whatever philosophical views Orwell might have been willing to agree with is of less importance than a debate about the philosophical views of Conant and Rorty themselves. That is, *1984* is insufficiently explicit on these matters to warrant a convincing interpretation of Orwell's philosophical leanings. Nevertheless it is important to have discussed the issue and made the distinction, because Conant goes a long way in attributing his own philosophical views to Orwell, and perhaps unacceptably so. To conclude the discussion on Orwell's possible philosophical views, then, let us look at the degree to which it is plausible that Orwell's views might in fact coincide with Conant's. As the latter's views have yet to be described in detail, let it suffice at this point to ask the question of whether Orwell, as Conant, believes there to be a necessary connection between certain vocabularies and what things we are able to talk about – or, more specific to *1984*, between a vocabulary and the kind of society it is possible to maintain.

There are indeed clear indications that Orwell believes in such necessary connections. This is evidenced in the text by the Party's strategies of promoting "Doublespeak" and "Newspeak". Doublespeak is a practice enforced on Party members whereby they learn to "believe two things at once". Because the Party is engaged in organized lying – not only about such events as their perpetual wars with the other super-states, but also about, e.g., mathematical truths – and correct mathematics are required for such things as construction and engineering, the practice of Doublespeak has been created in order to allow Party members to support Party doctrine while simultaneously being able to, e.g., carry out engineering tasks successfully.



This is but one reason for the existence of the practice of Doublespeak, but the important point is what the practice, as described by Orwell, seems to imply about his underlying views.

For one thing, it would seem that in order for the Party to reach and maintain their goal of systematically deceiving the public, they would only need to publically preach the Party doctrine (defiance naturally being answered with violence), while “sticking to the truth among themselves”. Yet this is not how Doublespeak is described by Orwell. Rather, he portrays Party members familiar with the practice as actually holding two contradictory beliefs at once, attesting to each with equal honesty. The counter-intuitiveness of this idea will not be discussed further, but the portrayal itself seems to be inconsistent, for Party members are described as knowing which of the two beliefs is “really true”. In what sense they are holding two contradictory beliefs at once, then, is unclear. More importantly, the fact that the Party enforces the practice seems to reveal a belief by Orwell that, say, familiar mathematical truths are so obviously, self-evidently true that it would not do for the Party simply to persuade its members that, e.g., two plus two equals five. This would lead to the devastation of scores of important practical undertakings, which in turn is itself taken as evidence for the truth of “old” mathematics. Furthermore, it seems to reveal the belief that simply persuading people to stop believing that two plus two equals *four* would be ridiculous, again because this is so self-evidently true. So, sticking to the example of mathematics, there seems to be an implicit belief that the truths of “old” mathematics are not merely self-evident because of their universally being held to be true – in which case systematic and, if necessary, violent “persuasion” would suffice to instill Party doctrine – but because this is necessarily so in some further sense. The description of the additional practice of Newspeak makes this even clearer.

Newspeak is the ideal language the Party is continually working to create, wherein vocabulary is strategically reduced so as to render the articulation of thoughts opposing Party doctrine literally impossible. This is especially telling, because again Orwell is describing a practice which seems to represent an unnecessarily complicated method for reaching the stated goal. Although removing the word “freedom” and related vocabulary might be seen as the easiest way to stop people from being able to talk about, and so perhaps desire, freedom, the vast

resources and manpower put to work on the development of Newspeak make it seem a more complicated way of reaching the Party's goals than – because the Party is practically omnipotent – simply through systematic indoctrination and violent oppression removing the relevant beliefs and desires. Such mass persuasion, as we all know, has been remarkably effective throughout history. The use of Newspeak in achieving the Party's goals, then, arguably reveals a belief in necessary connections between vocabularies and practical societal and political possibilities.

I hope it is safe to assume that the practices of Doublespeak and Newspeak are thought of as *necessary* to achieve the total control aimed for by the Party. It is hard to understand why such pervasive means would be employed if they were *not* thought necessary. We find it probable that they *are* thought necessary – Doublespeak because of the assumed ability of the not-completely-oppressed Party members to know the truth by themselves through familiarity with old concepts and norms, and Newspeak because of the thought that removing vocabulary simultaneously removes all chance of implementing the practices commonly associated with it.

Against this, it could be argued that Doublespeak and Newspeak, rather than being thought of as necessary for achieving the Party's aims, simply represent the easiest way of maintaining complete control. The vast effort expended in implementing the practices could be justified by the later ease of maintaining control once everybody truly believe in Party doctrine and there are no words available for talking about freedom, etc. Perhaps this is the real reason for the existence of the two practices, but even so, I would argue, there is reason to hold that the practices serve as evidence of the mentioned necessary connections. As regards Doublespeak, it seems to be an inherently more unstable practice than simply having people *believe otherwise* rather than believing two things at once. Furthermore, the clearly expressed view that Doublespeak is necessary for the successful continuation of, e.g., engineering is a clear indication of the belief that “old” mathematics works because it is true. The Rortian thought that mathematics should not be seen as working because it describes the inherent structure of reality is seemingly precluded. Again, although it could strictly be argued that the Party is

only hanging on to old vocabularies through the practice of Doublespeak *for purely practical reasons*, it is more plausible that they themselves believe old mathematics to be *true* (cf., “In philosophy, or religion, or ethics, or politics, two and two might make five, but when one was designing a gun or an aeroplane they had to make four”<sup>23</sup>) *and* that unless the vocabulary is changed (or how we are to interpret the strange description of Doublespeak) or removed (Newspeak) the possibility remains open that people will see through the lies and deception and turn against the Party. So, even the Party itself thinks that it is deviating from *the truth* with its practices, and apparently also thinks that if the old vocabulary is allowed to continue to exist, the very features of that vocabulary will allow people access to the truth, hence rendering the Party’s control unpredictable and unstable.

If these arguments for why Doublespeak and Newspeak figure in the novel are convincing, it becomes easier to see why Conant takes Orwell to agree with him on a number of central points. There is certainly (as should be expected) more to Conant’s position than the points on which Orwell could at this point be interpreted as agreeing with Conant, but these are nevertheless important points. In particular, the issue of the assumed necessary connections between vocabularies and practices is important. Let us now see which central claims Conant attributes to Orwell, and consider the extent to which there can be said to be overlap between Orwell and Conant, before going on to look at Conant’s own position in detail.

## 5. Conant’s Attributions

First of all, Conant supports the above line of reasoning when he says that “Orwell thinks that some of the most far-reaching transformations of human social, cultural and political life can be brought about *only* with the aid of a totalitarian tactical employment of sophisticated forms of philosophical *pseudotheorizing*.”<sup>24</sup> This sums up the points we have been making on Orwell’s behalf that, in order for a totalitarian ploy to succeed, it is necessary to thoroughly reform or reduce certain vocabularies, because there is a link between these vocabularies and truth-accessibility so that if they are kept in place there remains the danger that the totalitarian

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<sup>23</sup> Orwell: *1984*

<sup>24</sup> Conant, 292

scheme will not gain foothold because the old vocabularies give people a power, so to speak, of resistance.

Further points of overlap between Orwell and Conant emerge. Conant claims that Orwell, although he frequently uses realist-sounding vocabulary, is not therefore intending to express a subscription to metaphysical theses.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Conant goes as far as saying that Rorty is “unable to read [Orwell], who is concerned neither to attack nor to defend (1)-(8), but whose writings abound with remarks such as (1’)-(8’)) and who attaches great importance to the thoughts which such remarks express.”<sup>26</sup> So, first of all, Rorty fails to interpret Orwell because he thinks that the use of realist vocabulary must mean an attachment to metaphysical theses (or else be mere rhetoric serving other purposes than philosophical ones), and Orwell has no such attachments; secondly, there is a sense, even though no metaphysical theses are endorsed, in which philosophical theorizing can have vast practical effects; and thirdly, still not implying any attachment to metaphysical theses, there is a sense in which there exist necessary connections between certain vocabularies and possible practical achievements.

The first point has already been discussed. We should be allowed to say that even though an author does not explicitly hold a philosophical view, his writings can validly be interpreted as expressing such a view implicitly. In the case of Orwell, Rorty takes it that he would simply “side with the realists” if pressed to make his views explicit. While that passing remark – which is far from a central claim of Rorty’s, as he is concerned to present a pragmatist view of the novel rather than to determine Orwell’s intentions – can certainly be debated, Rorty does *not* hold neither the view that Orwell is mainly concerned to defend metaphysical theses nor the view that he, aware of the inherent ineffectiveness of philosophical vocabulary, is consciously using realist vocabulary mainly for other, say, redescriptive purposes. The important point, in fact, is not at all what Orwell intended the philosophical implications of his novel to be. As has been mentioned, those intentions must be separated from any views we might find expressed explicitly or implicitly in the novel, views which must then be argued for or against individually.

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<sup>25</sup> See points 1’-8’ in Conant, 279

<sup>26</sup> Conant

When Conant then uses his interpretation of Orwell's philosophical intentions in order to mount and support his own philosophical position, he arguably makes the mistake of thinking that the assumptions he find implicit in *1984* in and of themselves do anything to support his own position. That is, on the one hand, he takes the combination of the use of realist vocabulary and the lack of explicitly endorsed metaphysical theses to imply a position that is able to say something substantial about truth without endorsing realism, thereby attributing the position he himself is endorsing to Orwell; and on the other hand, more importantly, he takes the events portrayed in *1984* to strongly support the position that he and Orwell supposedly share.

Regarding the first of the two points, although we in the above discussion identified some points on which Orwell and Conant appear to be in agreement, it remains to be seen whether taking the former as aligning neatly with the latter can be justified. In order to determine both this issue and the issue of whether the events of *1984* support the view in question, however much this coincides with Orwell's, we need to delve into Conant's own, independently expressed position. This position is one influenced by Putnam, and so to get clearer about it, it will be useful here to present and discuss Putnam's internal realism. In addition to being an influence on Conant's position, it also clarifies the landscape of realist, anti-realist and other positions that are of relevance to us.

The following discussion will be one that proceeds in large part on the premises of *representationalist* positions. For Rorty, the dispute between realists and anti-realists is not one that needs to be resolved, but rather one that should simply be dismissed out of hand because both positions rely on the representationalist assumption Rorty seeks to undermine. The *antirepresentationalist* position which Rorty, largely inspired by the work of Donald Davidson, endorses will be detailed later. For now, it should be sufficient to state that the representationalist assumption implicit in the positions outlined in the following amounts to the claim that it is a characteristic feature of language that it is able to stand in a representational relation to the external world, such that what *make sentences true* are, say,

states of, objects in, or facts about the world. Given the assumption that the world makes sentences true or false, the remaining quarrel regards the contribution of language – whether it perhaps contributes to the truth or falsity of its sentences, or otherwise in what way it is able to stand in the suitable representational relations to the external world.

When we allow the discussion to proceed on these premises, this is both to be seen as an attempt to paint a faithful picture of Putnam's and Conant's positions in their entirety, and as a presentation of important background assumptions of views which we later, with Rorty, will counsel the futility of upholding. Let us with this in mind proceed with the presentation of Putnam's internal realism.

## **6. Putnam's Internal Realism**

Hilary Putnam's internal realism is presented in "Is There Still Anything To Say About Reality and Truth?"<sup>27</sup>, an excerpt from his book *The Many Faces of Realism*. The goal of Putnam's position is to preserve a commonsense realism in the face of what he takes to be devastating objections to scientific and metaphysical realism, and this is done through what can be described as a "synthesis of anti-realism and metaphysical realism"<sup>28</sup>, which seeks to preserve and improve certain aspects of those two positions. We will start with a presentation of Putnam's critique of scientific and metaphysical realism, before proceeding to detail the way in which his internal realism supposedly preserves commonsense realism while allowing for conceptual relativity, all the while avoiding radical cultural relativism.

In his paper, Putnam starts off with a fairly detailed critique of scientific realism, or what he calls the objectivist picture. This is the view "that only scientific objects 'really exist' and that much, if not all, of the commonsense world is mere 'projection'"<sup>29</sup>. Accompanying this is "the notion of a property that is merely 'appearance,' or merely something we 'project' onto the object"<sup>30</sup>. Thus, a property such as, e.g., redness is not part of a scientific object itself, but is

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<sup>27</sup> Putnam, Hilary: "Is There Still Anything To Say About Reality And Truth?", in Haack, Susan: *Pragmatism, Old and New* (Prometheus Books, 2006)

<sup>28</sup> Moretti, 13

<sup>29</sup> Putnam: "Is There Still Anything to Say", 623

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 624

rather to be seen as a “disposition to affect us in certain ways[. ...] The idea that these properties are ‘in’ the things themselves, as intrinsic properties, is a spontaneous ‘projection’”<sup>31</sup>.

The example Putnam uses in connection with dispositions is that of the disposition of sugar to dissolve in water. Without delving into specifics, the conclusion of the example is that there is no one, completely specifiable way in which this is a disposition of sugar. Now, a central idea in scientific realism is that what is real can only be that which “could be summed up in a closed formula in the language of fundamental physics.”<sup>32</sup> Because this seems to be impossible to do for (at least some kinds of) dispositions, these cannot be intrinsic parts of real objects. So, what can they be? The only alternative suggestion Putnam presents before moving on to his own view is that we could think of dispositions as “not ‘in the things themselves’ but rather something we ‘project’ onto those things”<sup>33</sup>. On this view, these dispositions or properties are not intrinsic parts of the objects, but rather something contributed by the mind. The problem, according to Putnam, is that this view of dispositions as projections entails that *thought* thus contributes to the creation of the objects themselves. Furthermore, because such a big part of the world is precisely such properties which cannot be intrinsic to scientific objects, this means that thought is responsible for the creation of perhaps even *most* of the world on this view. Such a form of idealism, as has already been discussed, is unacceptable to someone who wants to argue for a realist or even anti-realist position. Again, a view which claims that our access to the world is necessarily mediated by, say, language, is not therefore necessarily a form of idealism, for such a view is compatible with the existence of a world which is completely independent of us.

With this in mind, an objection to Putnam’s claim that projection entails idealism emerges. Putnam’s claim is that “to explain the features of the commonsense world [...] in terms of a mental operation called ‘projection’ is to explain [them] in terms of *thought*”<sup>34</sup>, thus charging scientific realism of entailing idealism. We would suggest, however, that Putnam is here

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 624-625

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 626

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 627

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 627

making an illegitimate inference from an epistemological to a metaphysical thesis. That is, the view that the commonsense features of the world owe their *existence qua* such features to this mental operation *would* entail idealism, because it is a claim about how the world is constituted, but it does not necessarily follow from a claim that these features are projections that scientific realism entails idealism, as Putnam claims. For the projection by us of features onto the world does not necessarily say anything about how the world is in itself, but rather about how the world appears to us. The *epistemological* thesis that the world appears to us to have certain features does not entail the *metaphysical* thesis that the world in fact has these features.

What is more, Putnam seems to make the further illegitimate claim that because dispositions, or the commonsense features of the world, cannot be intrinsic (according to scientific realists), they must necessarily be projections. That is a species of the fallacious inference that if something is not *this kind of thing*, it must be *that kind of thing*. For example, a discovery that something is not a mental substance does not itself yield the conclusion that the same thing *must* be a physical substance, unless we have also discovered that these are the only two types of substance that exist. As said, the features could simply be a product of how human beings perceive the world, and independent of how the world itself is constituted.

More importantly, the objections now detailed outline the relations between epistemological and metaphysical claims, which will be important in what follows. However, we need to distinguish one further type of claim which is typically referred to in discussions of realism, namely ontological claims. Ontology is the branch of metaphysics which attempts to say what the fundamental structure, categories and objects of the world are – it is engaged with exploring how nature, so to speak, “categorizes itself”, how the world is naturally divided up – and an ontological claim is thus a claim about this natural categorization. Distinguishing ontology from metaphysics in general makes possible the dispute between metaphysical realists and anti-realists, the positions that Putnam’s internal realism was described as a synthesis of. To recapitulate, if we take as fundamental to realism the claim that “*a*, *b*, and *c* and so on exist, and the fact that they exist and have properties such as *F-ness*, *G-ness*, and *H-*



ness is [...] independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on”<sup>35</sup>, we see that there are two aspects involved, namely *existence* and *independence*. Realism is thus both the claim that certain things exist and the claim that *facts* about these things are independent of (as we shall from now on confine ourselves to) linguistic practices. The first claim is a general metaphysical one, the second concerns ontological structure.

The way in which anti-realism distinguishes itself from realism is not through a rejection of both these theses. Rather, “anti-realism typically [concedes] the existence dimension but [rejects] the independence dimension.”<sup>36</sup> So, the anti-realist does not deny the existence of an external world, but he does reject that there is a describable natural division or structure that is independent of linguistic practices. “One could say that the contemporary anti-realists do not deny the causally independent existence of reality, but its language-independent objectivity.”<sup>37</sup> It should be pointed out that we are dealing with a semantic form of anti-realism. In this form, “[it] is standardly used to mean the claim, about some particular true statements, that there is no ‘matter of fact’ which they represent.”<sup>38</sup> The denial of a “matter of fact” here refers back to the rejection of language-independent objectivity, that is, the rejection that a describable structure of reality can be independent of language. Nevertheless, this is not meant as a complete rejection of the general idea that the world makes sentences true, but rather as saying that we have no means of determining whether some sentences “get reality right” in the sense of mapping on to its assumed inherent ontological structure. This is thus a claim about *our access* to the world in itself which questions our ability to have such access objectively. Because our access is necessarily mediated by language, there is simply no way to say that the descriptions we arrive at correspond to “nature’s own description of herself” without circularity, as we would then be using language to demonstrate the existence of language-independent fact.

The discussion we are now being led towards is not one that can be taken up in further detail here, but the point we will take with us as we proceed with the discussion of Putnam’s

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<sup>35</sup> Miller: “Realism”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Moretti, 10

<sup>38</sup> Rorty, Richard: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2 (hereafter *ORT*)

internal realism, is that so far nothing has been said that precludes the world from being the thing that makes our sentences true – only the possibility of our knowing in what way this might happen has been questioned.

A key idea of internal realism is that realism does not have to be incompatible with conceptual relativism. To begin with, this seems possible given that we accept the anti-realist's take on the different aspects of realism as detailed above. That is, on the face of it, it squares with the ideas that descriptions of reality cannot be language-independent but that there is still a substantial sense in which they can be true. This last point might be clarified by Putnam's claim that conceptual relativity does not entail radical cultural relativism. That is a position which goes even further than anti-realism. Not only does the radical cultural relativist say that there is no language-independent objectivity, he denies that there is *any* contribution by the world in making our sentences true or false. Thus all that matters in deciding truth or falsity is justification internal to a linguistic community. The "truth or falsity of everything we say [...] is simply 'decided' by the culture"<sup>39</sup>, and any substantial connection with the world is lost. This is of course an intolerable position for someone who wants to argue that the world contributes to truth or falsity, even if language plays a key role as regards our access, and it is a position Putnam is fiercely opposed to (and one he attributes to Rorty<sup>40</sup>).

Let us now look at conceptual relativism more directly. Putnam uses an example involving Polish logicians for illustration, in which he considers a world consisting only of three individuals. The question of how many objects there are in this world would be answered intuitively by saying "three", but certain Polish logicians engaged in the study of mereology would say that there are in fact seven or eight objects, because "for every two particulars there is an object which is their sum[, and some would also include the] 'null object'"<sup>41</sup>. How do we decide between the two versions? The reply by the metaphysical realist would be "to say that there is a single world (think of this as a piece of dough) which we can slice into pieces in

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<sup>39</sup> Putnam: "Is There Still Anything to Say", 631

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Putnam, Hilary: "Pragmatism and nonscientific knowledge", in Conant, James & Zeglen, Urszula M. (eds.): *Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and realism* (Routledge, 2002)

<sup>41</sup> Putnam: "Is There Still Anything to Say", 629-630

different ways.”<sup>42</sup> Putnam argues that this reply “founders on the question, ‘What are the ‘parts’ of this dough?’”<sup>43</sup>, because it fails to give a neutral account of what the parts are – both the intuitive version and the Polish logician’s version seem on the face of it to have equal merit. If we, for the sake of argument, accept that there are a number of equally acceptable versions available (as does seem to be a consequence of this “cookie cutter metaphor” as long as we remain within the framework of a realism which claims that the world has a certain ontological structure), there emerges the problem that we “will have conceded that which entities are ‘abstract entities’ and which are ‘concrete objects,’ at least, is version-relative”<sup>44</sup>, because each version makes different, and substantial, claims about the parts of the dough. Metaphysical realism would presumably have to say that the world can only have one ontological structure, and so the seeming existence of different possible versions renders this position unable to account for that structure.

It is clear that Putnam assumes that there in fact are several possible versions available, and so we must look at his arguments for this conceptual relativism. The arguments seem to take off from the anti-realist claim that we have no way to determine the correctness of any one of the versions as compared to any other. Given a number of versions, there is no way to verify which one is correct, or indeed whether only one *can* be correct. The way Putnam expresses this is simply to say that “the logical primitives themselves, and in particular the notions of object and existence, have a multitude of different uses rather than one absolute ‘meaning’.”<sup>45</sup> That statement does not in itself necessitate the anti-realist claim of undecidability, but all the while Putnam insists on preserving a commonsense realism with a substantial ontology (which commonsense realism clearly entails), which at least means that there has to be some way the world is, and that there is some connection between language and the world, this would have to be his assumption.

As mentioned, Putnam wants to argue that conceptual relativity is compatible with realism. The problem is that, so far, he has not given us any arguments for why the two are in fact

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 630

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 631

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 630 (italics removed)

compatible other than pointing to the fact that concepts have a multitude of uses, which hardly shows how these different uses are in fact able to hook up with a reality that must be assumed to have a single ontological structure. In fact, I want to argue that the claim about multiple uses is what most clearly shows that Putnam again makes an illegitimate inference from an epistemological to a metaphysical thesis. The argument is taken from Moretti:

Conceptual relativity involves that there are alternative descriptions of the objects and the classes of objects that, according to the metaphysical realist, exist independently of our language. Putnam emphasises that there is apparently no objective way to decide among these descriptions. Let us call this *epistemological* thesis (M). Putnam then concludes, from (M), that objects and classes of objects do not exist independently of our conceptual schemes. Let us call this *ontological* thesis (O).<sup>46</sup>

So, Putnam argues that, because *we cannot know* which descriptions match the ontological structure in any specific case, that structure cannot *exist* independently of our conceptual schemes. It is clear that this conclusion does not follow from the premise. What we can know about something does not necessarily imply anything about the nature of that something. For example, “an alternative and *prima facie* equally plausible explanation not involving (O) is – simply – that our limited cognitive faculties provide us with no epistemic access to the objects and classes of objects that constitute the world.”<sup>47</sup> We have to conclude that the conceptual relativity argument fails to characterize the relation between our conceptual schemes and the world.

The conceptual relativity argument is not the only argument in favor of internal realism. Those presented in the article under consideration, however, are, as Putnam himself says, programmatic and broad. Nevertheless, let us look at these suggestions, which are inspired by, respectively, Ludwig Wittgenstein and W. O. Quine, as they are important to Conant’s and Putnam’s further attempts at framing a position which, while differing from realism and anti-realism, nevertheless supposes to be able to account for a notion of objective, external fact.

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<sup>46</sup> Moretti, 239

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Even though the conceptual relativity argument failed to establish its conclusion because of an illegitimate inference, we should not make the related mistake of concluding that there is no way to establish a connection with the world given conceptual relativity. Just because one argument for that conclusion failed, it does not mean that there can be no others.

So, what we would need is a way to get past undecidability and establish how our descriptions can be correct. The first suggestion made by Putnam is clearly inspired by Wittgenstein's later philosophy, which aimed to expose philosophical problems and theories as simply *nonsense*, in the sense of violating the bounds of linguistic sense, thus dissolving the problems rather than solving them. This, along with his Wittgensteinian claim that expressions have different uses rather than essential meanings, inspires Putnam to say that "God himself, if he consented to answer the question, 'Do points really exist or are they mere limits?,' would say 'I don't know'; not because His omniscience is limited, but because there is a limit to how far questions make sense."<sup>48</sup> This illustrates Wittgenstein's claim that meaning *just is* use, i.e., that the nature of language is such that there is no one, essential meaning of any given expression. Rather, meaning is to be found in the various ordinary uses we make of the expressions – their "face value". Using the idea of an omniscient God in the example shows that Putnam believes this to be a substantial claim, i.e., expressions really do not have absolute meanings. The problem still remains, however, of how to establish a form of realism within such a framework – one that is able to account for the connection between language and the world in a more satisfactory way than simply taking it for granted that some descriptions *are* correct, without saying *how*.

This is not what Putnam's second suggestion does either. That suggestion draws on the pragmatist views that we should reject the distinction between scheme and content, and "the spectator point of view in metaphysics and epistemology"<sup>49</sup>, as well as on Quine's suggestion that there is no "better justification [...] for accepting an ontology than its indispensability in our scientific practice"<sup>50</sup>. As Putnam puts it, "what can giving up the spectator view in

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<sup>48</sup> Putnam: "Is There Still Anything to Say", 631

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 632

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

philosophy mean if we don't extend the pragmatic approach to the most indispensable 'versions' of ourselves and our world that we possess?"<sup>51</sup>

Again it will not do to conclude, from the premise that indispensability in our practices is the best justification for accepting an ontology, that that ontology must be correct. All in all, the two suggestions presented in this section are not able to help Putnam directly in establishing internal realism. We have seemingly found no help in the presented forms of realism and anti-realism, but before moving on to the Wittgensteinian aspects of Conant's and Putnam's positions in order to see whether some help can be found there, it is time for an antirepresentationalist interlude. The antirepresentationalist outlook of Rorty and others will be detailed more thoroughly later, but as the position to be reviewed in the following serves equally as an inspiration to both Rorty and Conant it will be useful to have both their positions outlined before moving on.

## 7. Antirepresentationalist interlude

The antirepresentationalist view of language is set out perhaps most clearly in Rorty's introduction to his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*. As distinguished from the anti-realist position detailed above, which holds that although a sentence might be true, there is no matter of fact which it represents – thus still granting the basic intuition that the world accounts for a sentence's being true – antirepresentationalism holds that “no linguistic items represent *any* nonlinguistic items.”<sup>52</sup> This is intended not as a decoupling of language from the world – as we shall see later, the causal relationship between us and the world is of central importance on this view – but as a thorough denial that the world in any sense makes our sentences *true*. In a nutshell, this position diagnoses the thought that the world makes our sentences true as a confusion of “the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified in holding a belief with the claim that some nonlinguistic state of the world *is itself an example of truth*.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *ORT*, 2

<sup>53</sup> *CIS*, 5

This thoroughly anti-empiricist position, while it acknowledges our causal interaction with the world, views language as no more than the sophisticated coping mechanism of a highly complex natural creature. This means that while the world is the (purely causal) source of our beliefs, “[socialization ...] goes all the way down”<sup>54</sup> as regards questions of communication, meaning, justification and truth. This is the sense in which the representational relation between language and the world is denied – linguistic or communicative abilities “have no more of a *representational* relation to an intrinsic nature of things than does the anteater’s snout or the bowerbird’s skill at weaving.”<sup>55</sup> It is simply a highly complex method of coping with our environment and other human beings, one developed and refined over a vast period of time, differing not in kind but only in complexity of goals and purposes produced and achieved using this mechanism.

This view of language is meant to accord better with the view of human beings as thoroughly natural creatures with no transcendental abilities, and aims to shift the burden of explanation on to the representationalist by pointing out how his view is hard to reconcile with a naturalism that is seen as desirable. This, along with the attempt to show how truth, conceived as representations of reality, has no useful explanatory force, will take center stage in the later attempt at building support for Rorty’s self-described “cultural-political initiative”<sup>56</sup> of removing the representational view of truth. Thus proposed *not* as a demonstration of the impossibility or non-existence of truth and related notions, but rather as a demonstration of the futility of invoking these, Rorty’s is an attempt at changing our view of ourselves and our relation to the world, with the explicit aim of promoting solidarity, democracy, openness and other concrete social-political values and institutions. The familiar accusations of relativism, reductive scientism (in embracing Darwin’s theory), intellectual irresponsibility, etc., will be met, and by simultaneously seeking to expose assumptions about truth and reason as devoid of explanatory force and showing how we might do fine without these assumptions, we hope to give a balanced presentation of Rorty’s views and their motivation.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 185

<sup>55</sup> Rorty, Richard: *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48 (hereafter *TP*)

<sup>56</sup> Rorty, Richard: *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10 (hereafter *PCP*)

Rorty is strongly inspired by Wittgenstein's attacks on philosophical pretensions to discover the essential nature of things – in particular pretensions to discover the essential meanings of the words and sentences of our language – but differs from Conant and Putnam in what he takes on board from Wittgenstein. In what follows, we will take a look at Wittgenstein's view of language, and in particular his claim that philosophical theories are *nonsense*. It is a central claim of Conant's that Orwell, while being neither a realist nor anti-realist, nevertheless is able to distinguish objectively between totalitarian and non-totalitarian societies, and through that distinction to show that *truth is lost* in the totalitarian scenario. According to Conant, he is able to do this without explicit reference to philosophical theory, but rather through a more direct use of a certain vocabulary. *1984*, and in particular the practices of Doublespeak and Newspeak, is taken to show in a more direct way how certain uses of language (and the removal of certain vocabularies) lead to the loss of truth and a descent into an objectively inferior society. Conant here simultaneously embraces the Wittgensteinian claim that philosophical theory amounts to nonsense in denying claims of discovering the essential nature of things, and the claim that meaning *consists in* use in taking *1984* to show how we, without the aid of realist assumptions, can nevertheless uphold a preference for the non-totalitarian scenario on objective grounds. The phrase “consists in” will be of importance in what follows, as it encapsulates the difference between Conant's and Rorty's take on Wittgenstein. It will be argued that some unfortunate morsels of representationalism is left even in Wittgenstein's later thought, and that Conant's use of Wittgenstein does not break free from this aspect of it. A discussion of Wittgenstein's notion of nonsense will hopefully clarify this point. Rorty phrases his view of the result of the claim to nonsense as simply one of “an explanation of the obscure by the more obscure”<sup>57</sup>, but in the following we will expand on this and further attempt to point out the role of representationalism in this picture.

## 8. Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein's critique of philosophical language games, which concludes that philosophical theories are nonsense, in fact begins with a critique of an exclusively representational view of language wherein “the words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such

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<sup>57</sup> *PCP*, 167



names”<sup>58</sup>. According to Wittgenstein, the danger lies in thinking that it is possible to arrive at a final, fully analyzed and exact form of all our expressions – an ideal language. Such a view would imply that language has a hidden structure that needs to be uncovered if we are to grasp its essence.<sup>59</sup> Through series of examples aiming to undermine the representational picture of language, we are shown how it is in fact impossible to find a uniting feature – an essence – of all the uses of any of our words or expressions. There is not room to expand on these examples here, as we will instead focus on Rorty’s main strategies for undermining the representational picture later.

Still, why is it that we have come to believe there must be such essences, and that they are hidden from plain view? Wittgenstein seeks to expose this belief as simply a feeling we have because of a “sublimation of our whole account of logic.”<sup>60</sup> The account of logic is that of a set of exceptionless inferential procedures and rules – the very epitome of an ideal system – which seems to entail that there can be only one final set of meanings. Because we believe logic to be an essential feature of language, a feeling is created that there must actually exist a hidden, ideal structure for us to uncover. However, this very view of logic is simply a *belief* we have about its nature, and this was “not something I had *discovered*: it was a requirement”<sup>61</sup> that I proceeded to impose on my view of language precisely because of the belief. If this ideal logical structure is not present in language, then we are no longer bound by the requirements of exactness and completeness. Now Wittgenstein claims that “[the] *preconception* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole inquiry around. [...] One might say: the inquiry must be turned around, but on the pivot of our real need”<sup>62</sup> rather than that of our previous preconception. The inquiry must no longer be based around the supposition that there must be an ideal, completely analyzed language. Instead we must now seek to understand the workings of language without imposing this requirement on it.

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<sup>58</sup> Wittgenstein, §1, p.5e

<sup>59</sup> Wittgenstein, §91, p. 47e-48e

<sup>60</sup> Wittgenstein, §94, p. 48e

<sup>61</sup> Wittgenstein, §107, p. 51e

<sup>62</sup> Wittgenstein, §108, p. 51e

Wittgenstein proceeds to insist, in opposition to the preconception about logic, that we need only to “look and see how propositions work”<sup>63</sup> in order to see that ordinary language is in perfect order and does not have a hidden structure that must be uncovered. The results of the investigation of propositions – and ‘proposition’ must be taken to include both syntactic and semantic features as well as norms of usage – amount to what can be described as a commonsensical understanding of our linguistic transactions. According to Wittgenstein we should take this kind of understanding at face value, and not assume that there is some hidden, more ideal form of the expression that we need to grasp in order to truly understand it. Having thus exposed the feeling that there is something hidden behind the surface as an illusion created by the sublimation of a view of logic which in turn originates in an arbitrary belief, the road lies open to accepting our intuitive linguistic understanding and our ordinary forms of language as perfectly intelligible as they stand.

The realization we should come to, then, is that ordinary language simply *works*. Why is this so? “Well, your very questions were framed in this language; they had to be expressed in this language, if there was anything to ask!”<sup>64</sup> The point here seems to be that if the questions can successfully be conveyed in this language, then there must be a sense in which the answers can be expressed in the same language. The objection that this is circular – that it assumes that ordinary language works when this is the fact that needs to be explained – can be countered by pointing out that if your questions cannot meaningfully be asked in this language that you in fact asked them in, you yourself have failed to get the inquiry off the ground. If ordinary language does not work in some sense, there is simply no open path ahead, not even – or, rather, certainly not – to a more technical, idealized language. It looks like the critique of the Augustinian picture, and the attempt to show how language should be viewed as governed by use rather than representation, and by “public standards and criteria of correctness”<sup>65</sup>, through the series of examples undermining classical views of meaning, is a convincing strategy on the general level. The result looks like a pragmatic conception of language which places meaning firmly in a social context of shared norms, or rules, for correct use. These norms

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<sup>63</sup> Wittgenstein, §93, p. 48e

<sup>64</sup> Wittgenstein, §120, p. 54e

<sup>65</sup> Biletzki, Anat: “Ludwig Wittgenstein”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>

“describe how we use words[, but] they are not idealized as an external system to be conformed to.”<sup>66</sup>

However, Wittgenstein distinguishes philosophical language games from, at least, commonsensical and scientific ones, and says that they in attempting to go beyond the face value of ordinary expressions fail to make sense in the way just described. In some sense they go beyond the limits for language’s ability to make sense. While Wittgenstein holds that, e.g., scientific language games *are* able to represent reality in a substantial sense, philosophical ones are not – they are not even able to make sense.

What is the import of the distinction between representing reality and making sense on Wittgenstein’s view? First of all, it is clear that both ordinary and scientific (“specialized”) language games make sense. Scientific language games are further able to represent reality, but this representational function was denied for non-specialized language games because we cannot determine essential meanings of expressions in these language games. However, that is only to say that the *uses* to which expressions in the latter language games are put vary broadly, while in the specialized language games – hence the name – these are made clear. We will leave aside the question whether these uses’ being made clear amounts to specifying in more ordinary terms what these uses are, or something else entirely. What we are aiming to expound is an apparent assumption behind the distinction between the ability and inability to *make sense*. The claim that scientific language games are able to make sense on a par with ordinary language games, and are also able to represent reality, shows us that as long as the use of expressions is made clear (in accordance with the ordinary manner described above), a substantial link to the world, other than a purely causal one, is acknowledged as a matter of course. Thus the insistence on refraining from going beyond our language games does not seem to amount to a denial of the world’s making our sentences true in the manner of Rorty.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

## 9. Wittgenstein and Skepticism

To get clearer about the manner in which philosophical language games are unable to make sense, let us now consider how Wittgenstein responds to philosophical skepticism. He criticizes skepticism for being “not a false, but an incoherent position. Its claims cannot have a truth value because they violate the bounds of sense. So, the skeptic does not hold a position at all.”<sup>67</sup>

“If you are not certain about any fact [such as the facts about nature or about our natural actions and reactions], you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either”<sup>68</sup>. This quote embodies the core of Wittgenstein’s critique of skepticism. Normally, such a critique would take the form of trying to refute the skeptic on his own terms, thus accepting that the problem, as presented by the skeptic himself, is a genuine one. The skeptic would for example claim that because we cannot be absolutely certain about the truth of any one of our beliefs, we cannot claim to really know anything, for certainty is a condition of having real knowledge. An attempt to solve this problem on its own terms could take the form of trying to identify kinds of belief that are absolutely certain because *basic* in some sense – e.g., beliefs based solely on direct perception – and which could then form the foundation on which to build the rest of our belief system.

This is not the approach Wittgenstein takes in replying to the skeptic. Rather, he seeks to expose the skeptic’s formulation of the problem itself as incoherent. This is done by pointing out that the result of the skeptical claim that we cannot be certain about any fact is that the claim itself becomes unintelligible. For if we cannot be certain about *any* fact whatsoever, we cannot claim to be certain that the skeptical claim has any meaning, and so we cannot even begin to know whether it is correct. So, rather than solving the skeptical problem as presented by the skeptic, Wittgenstein undermines and dissolves it. It is not a genuine problem, for its conclusion renders the problem itself unintelligible.

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<sup>67</sup> Colby, Mark: Philosophy 409 lecture notes, 11/17-2010

<sup>68</sup> Colby, Mark: “Foundationalism and Skepticism”, Philosophy 409 course material

So far we have exposed a seeming inconsistency in the original formulation of the problem. However, Wittgenstein wants to do more than this. According to him, the approach taken by the skeptic is fundamentally misguided. The main assumption underlying the skeptical position is, as mentioned, that we at least need a foundation of absolutely certain beliefs to ensure that we can have any knowledge. However, not only is the claim incoherent, but it is misguided to even think that we *need* such foundations. To think this is equivalent to thinking that we need some kind of special justification for our beliefs, one that will be provided by philosophy.

A central point of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, as mentioned, is that no such special *philosophical* justification is needed. We can take our shared understanding of ordinary language at face value – there is no need for philosophy to provide special assurances that we are able to talk meaningfully or that we really have knowledge. In fact, not only is it not necessary for philosophy to provide this special, absolute kind of justification, but its pretensions to do so violate the bounds of sense. The results of such theories are *nonsense*, because they are engaged in a futile attempt at describing the ultimate nature of things in a way somehow transcending our ordinary descriptions. There is simply no way to escape our ordinary and scientific uses of language and describe reality “from outside”, and so these attempts result in nonsense.

Wittgenstein distinguishes “three types of justification: ordinary or everyday justification, specialized justification (in, e.g., science, law or theology), and philosophical justification (which is illusory).”<sup>69</sup> In everyday life, members of a community who share a language or certain ways of speaking are able to speak perfectly meaningfully with each other – there is no need for external justification. In the specialized languages of the empirical sciences, there are also shared ways of speaking and methods that provide all the justification needed. What these two types of justification have in common is that they are “internal to a language game, while philosophy searches for a special type of justification, giving rise to the quest for

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<sup>69</sup> Philosophy 409 lecture notes, 11/17-2010

foundations.”<sup>70</sup> The mistake of philosophy is to look for a kind of justification that transcends, and is valid for and independent of *all* language games whatsoever. In doing this, philosophy violates the bounds of sense, because we can only make sense of linguistic expressions from within a language game. There is no way we could climb outside of language and reach a kind of understanding that is completely detached from the kind of shared structure that comprises a language game. We could not even know what such an understanding would be like.

Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in general does not take the form of arguing for specific theses. Rather, it is mainly negative, and aims to be therapeutic through exposing typical philosophical problems as senseless pseudo-problems that are to be dissolved rather than solved. However, it is not *purely* negative in character. The claim that philosophical problems are pseudo-problems because they violate the bounds of sense seems to entail that there exists a domain, or domains, of language wherein meaningful statements can be made. When Wittgenstein then goes a long way in specifying the language games within which this can happen, he is making a positive claim about meaningful language. Let us therefore turn away for a moment from his dissolution of philosophical problems and look at some of the positive claims which form Wittgenstein’s framework and which are reasons why he specifically denies the meaningfulness of *philosophical* theories.

First of all, as has already been gestured at, it seems that Wittgenstein is claiming that philosophical theories are *positively senseless*. I.e., while ordinary language and the specialized languages of empirical sciences are meaningful at least partly because these language games contain their own standards of correctness, philosophical theories fail to meet this demand, and are thus not just without a foundational essence that can be determined externally, though on a par with all other language games, but *fail to make sense*. Contrary to this, Baker and Hacker try to show how Wittgenstein’s conception of nonsense is purely *negative*: “A statement that something cannot be, i.e. is logically impossible, is not a description of a possibility that is impossible – but nonsense.”<sup>71</sup> In our case, it is not that theories could have represented reality, but failed to do so – they are *simply* nonsense. Perhaps

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Baker, G. P. & Hacker, P. M. S.: *Wittgenstein, Understanding and Meaning* (Basil Blackwell, 1980), 480

we can rephrase this as the claim that they have no use in any of our language games. However, in *forbidding* the creation of philosophical theories and insisting on ordinary or specialized language games, Wittgenstein seems to claim that philosophical theories *could not* have a use in our language – a possibility that is impossible. Delineating which language games make sense and which *could not* in the way Wittgenstein does is difficult not to see as a *positive* claim about the whole set of language games in question, and seems to render the notion of nonsense a positive one as well.

The backdrop to Wittgenstein's view of language games might serve to clarify this further. That is, outlining Wittgenstein's more general framework for language and communication will expose some assumptions that will be useful for clarifying Conant's and Rorty's respective Wittgensteinian influences. Two features are particularly important in this regard: a shared structure that provides the possibility of successful communication at all, and the rule-governed character of linguistic action. Let us first look at what the shared structure might be.

Wittgenstein says that “our language game only works [...] when a certain agreement prevails”<sup>72</sup>. This is not to be regarded as a shared set of opinions, but a more general structure that must necessarily be presupposed for successful communication to take place. Some such view is normally a starting point in philosophy of language to this day, and indeed it seems intuitively correct that for communication to be successful – in the sense of a resulting *proper* understanding – there must exist something that is shareable. Otherwise it is perhaps hard to understand how we can be able to truly grasp the meanings of utterances. In contemporary philosophy of language, the vehicle of linguistic content is often taken to be the proposition, where propositions are “the primary bearers of truth-value, the objects of belief and other ‘propositional attitudes’ (i.e., what is believed, doubted, etc.)”<sup>73</sup>, which are viewed as abstract entities able to account for the possibility of true, shared understanding. Wittgenstein is far from this explicit in his view of what the shared structure consists in, and in fact he says rather

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<sup>72</sup> Colby, Mark: “Wittgenstein's Naturalism”, Philosophy 409 course material, 1

<sup>73</sup> McGrath, Matthew: “Propositions”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/propositions/>

little about this *directly* in relation to how language games work, but he does say more about it in connection with human nature in general. We will come to that shortly. Nevertheless, with regard to language, he emphasizes that “without a shared human nature, there could be no regularities of action, such as similar uses of linguistic signs on different occasions”<sup>74</sup>. We will not discuss the degree to which there would also have to exist shared, specifically *linguistic* structures. The important point is the idea of the necessity of some kind of shared structure providing the possibility of regularities, and in any case Wittgenstein situates our linguistic practices within a larger network of practical human activities, regarding them as fundamentally intertwined with and inseparable from such a network.

As for the second main characteristic, “the concept of language-games points at the rule-governed character of language. This does not entail strict and definite systems of rules for each and every language-game, but points to the conventional nature of this sort of human activity.”<sup>75</sup> The critique of philosophical pretensions to discover essences becomes especially clear in the context of the nature of language games. “Instead of these symptoms of the philosopher's ‘craving for generality’, he points to ‘family resemblance’ as the more suitable analogy for the means of connecting particular uses of the same word. [...] We should [...] travel with the word's uses through ‘a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing’”<sup>76</sup>.

So, the picture sketched of language games so far is that of a conventional activity, dependent on the uses to which a specific community or culture as a whole puts its linguistic expressions, while this is seen against a backdrop of a shared human nature without which we would have no basis for mutual understanding. We will in the following concentrate more on the shared structures than the rule-governed character of language games, as we will be taking a critical look at the assumed necessity of such structures for the possibility of successful communication. We will argue that this most fundamental part of Wittgenstein's framework, from within which he launches his critique of philosophical language games in general and

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<sup>74</sup> Colby, Mark: “Wittgenstein's Naturalism”, Philosophy 409 Rutgers University course material (2010), 1

<sup>75</sup> Biletzki

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



skepticism in particular, might not only be seen as unnecessary for the attempt to account for our communicative practices, but is also an unfortunate presupposition that is hard to square with Wittgenstein's general advice that we should stop looking for essences.

Wittgenstein also phrases the claim that there must exist a shared human nature for proper understanding to take place in another – more specifically linguistic – way when he says that we cannot *start with nothing*, i.e., without any presuppositions whatsoever about the way language functions. It is perhaps best to take a closer look at Wittgenstein's naturalism to see how he construes the backdrop of linguistic activity:

[Regularities] of agreement form the framework for all human behavior; it is the “background against which we see any action” (Z, §567) and the framework by which language functions (RFM, p. 342). [...] This antecedent agreement is not in opinions or convictions (RFM, p. 332), but in non-ratiocinative judgments (RFM, p. 343), such as judgments of perceptual similarities and differences. For example, judgments about color discrimination presuppose the sensory apparatus that is the natural endowment of normal human beings (RFM, p. 342; Z, §345) and complete agreement by “normal people” (PI, p. 227).<sup>77</sup>

This looks like a thoroughly naturalistic construal of the human situation. It seems to represent minimal assumptions about the shared backdrop of linguistic activity. However, we need to make clear how we get from this background of purely non-ratiocinative judgments and to linguistic understanding. The natural first response would be to say that Wittgenstein's placement of language within a larger network of activities takes care of this. Linguistic action should be seen as intertwined with human action in general, what he calls a “form of life”. From this he goes on to say that “[giving] grounds, [...] justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not [...] a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*”<sup>78</sup>. It now becomes clear that language just *is* action on Wittgenstein's view. “The origin [...] of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop”<sup>79</sup>. Thus it seems that we cannot attribute to Wittgenstein anything like the contemporary view of propositions as abstract, linguistic entities capable of having a truth value. Not only that, but he goes as far as saying, “I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to

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<sup>77</sup> Colby: “Wittgenstein's Naturalism”, 1

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

which one grants instinct but not ratiocination.”<sup>80</sup> So, not only is the shared framework of linguistic activity not based on ratiocinative judgments – it would seem that human beings simply do not *have the ability* commonly called ratiocination.

These views remind one of Donald Davidson’s theory of radical interpretation. Although that theory has a semantic focus, it parallels Wittgenstein’s view in saying that there are certain assumptions we need to make to explain the phenomena of meaning and understanding. On Davidson’s theory, we need to assume that the beliefs of the person we are trying to understand, be it someone whose language we understand or not, have a certain degree of *coherence*. That is, a significant portion of their beliefs must be “rational” on a par with our own belief system – we need to be able to recognize a certain pattern of rationality to even begin to interpret someone’s utterances. Importantly, however, Davidson rejects the distinction between scheme and content – “the idea that one can distinguish within knowledge or experience between a conceptual component (the ‘conceptual scheme’) and an empirical component (the ‘empirical content’)”<sup>81</sup>. This rejection of the empiricist idea that the conceptual structures of languages are somehow able to map onto the structure of the world and so possibly correctly describe it in this substantial sense places the interpretive schemes in question firmly within the context of *our point of view* – a recognition of the unavoidable localness of any attribution of rationality.

This is a more fundamental rejection than that which Wittgenstein makes of super-concepts (as over against regular concepts), and leads Davidson to say that “the agent has only to reflect on what a belief is to appreciate that most of his basic beliefs are true, and among his beliefs, those most securely held and that cohere with the main body of his beliefs are the most apt to be true.”<sup>82</sup> “True” now, of course, does not refer to a correct representation by a conceptual component of an empirical component – a representationalist or empiricist view of truth – but should rather be understood, according to Rorty, as reflecting that “Davidson takes

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Malpas, Jeff: “Donald Davidson”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/davidson/>

<sup>82</sup> Davidson, Donald: “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”, quoted in Rorty, Richard: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 10

off from Darwin rather than from Descartes: from beliefs as adaptations to the environment rather than as quasi-pictures.”<sup>83</sup> On this construal of Davidson’s view, then, the truth of our basic beliefs is equated with a successful habit of action, where what determines success is thoroughly influenced by the whole of one’s network of belief and, importantly, social mediation.

Although Davidson continued to resist Rorty’s construal of his view and the refusal to grant special significance to the concept of truth, this naturalistic construal of Davidson has been an important inspiration for Rorty and will be central to the presentation of him below. Although there is no room here for a further discussion of the disagreement between Rorty and Davidson, we can at least note the fact that the attack on representationalism is made explicit by Davidson: “it is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking that there are representations which engenders thoughts of relativism.”<sup>84</sup> The way in which the scheme-content distinction gives rise to relativism will be detailed later, but for now the central point is how a certain naturalistic point of view leads to the rejection of representationalism.

Now, Davidson’s Darwinian view of belief looks similar to Wittgenstein’s view of language as action. However, as we know, Wittgenstein does not want to do away with representation. On the contrary, he claims that, e.g., the language games of empirical sciences are able to represent reality. Even though Wittgenstein equates meaning with use and thus places meaning within a larger context of behavior or action, the fact that he holds on to representationalism results in an unfortunate dismissal of philosophical language games that is hard to construe in the negative way that, e.g., Baker and Hacker wish to construe it. Retaining representationalism for some language games, but not for others, makes that construal hard to defend, and instead makes it look like Wittgenstein has discovered the substantial limits of language when he precludes philosophical theory construction. Given the fact that we are given no separate reason for accepting the claim about which language games make sense and which do not other than the claim that there is no apparent “face value” to

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<sup>83</sup> *ORT*, 10

<sup>84</sup> Davidson, Donald: “The Myth of the Subjective”, quoted in Rorty, Richard: *Truth and Progress*, 48

such philosophical claims, and the fact that “we are told little about everydayness – [it] is simply what philosophers are out of touch with”<sup>85</sup>, thus seemingly promoting the special abilities of whatever language games count as ordinary at any given time, the preclusion of philosophical language games is less than convincing.

The point here is that even the attempt to build a foundation for meaning on very basic, seemingly thoroughly naturalistic, behavior leads immediately to difficulty unless we are told more about the links between this behavior and more advanced activities like language games. It is our contention that the fact that the language game originates in a reaction, and can thus itself be seen as simply more advanced forms of socially mediated reactions, entails nothing like a representational relation to reality. It is the follow-up to the basic thought that regularities of agreement form the framework for all human behavior, namely the subsequent claim that these must be shared structures if proper communication is to be accounted for, which is the problem here. We want to expose this as just another form of the scheme-content distinction, although one attempting as basic a construal as possible in taking its cue from basic reactions. Nevertheless, the representationalist intuition embodied in the scheme-content distinction, we would say, is what accounts for the urge to go beyond the portrayal of human beings as more than just complicated animals and to postulate the necessity of shared structures.

This point can perhaps be made clearer if we consider where Wittgenstein focuses his efforts in his defense of ordinary language. It is in fact not so much on representation as it is on *exactness*. First, the attack on ideal languages takes the form of criticizing the thought that we might discover the exact meanings of our expressions through demonstrating the “complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing”, that comes into play in the determination of meanings. Secondly, Wittgenstein refuses to grant *ratiocination*, or *exact thinking*, to human beings. We see that the focus is not so much on the positive ability we might have to connect with the world in a representationalist fashion, but on the negative point that we, because our languages come down to a complicated interplay of reactions

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<sup>85</sup> *PCP*, 167

which yields the complicated network of similarities, are unable to reach the kind of ultimate, ideal descriptions philosophers are typically after.

When we are then “told little about everydayness”, this should perhaps be seen as resulting from the fact that Wittgenstein, even though he rejected the fundamentalism of philosophers, retained some basic representationalist intuitions. It seems plausible that he took a basic representationalist outlook for granted, but wanted to temper our aspirations to exactness and completeness by pointing to the futility of efforts to obtain these. Thus the role of the world is fully acknowledged, while our aspirations as regards our access to it are tempered. In this sense, the positive question of representational abilities, although granted, takes a backseat to the negative claim about exactness.

The beginning of our discussion of Wittgenstein involved his criticism of the Augustinian picture of language: “[The] words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. – In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.”<sup>86</sup> Does Wittgenstein’s criticism of this view not amount to, precisely, a rejection of representationalism? Are we on the wrong track in attributing representationalist assumptions to Wittgenstein? Again we would hold that Wittgenstein’s focus is less on representation than it is on exactness, or determinacy. His examples demonstrate the difficulty of pinning down one meaning for words or expressions, but this is a separate question from whether the world contributes to the truth of those expressions.

The point that we are unable to pin down exact meanings would be reconcilable with the world playing such a role, and could be explained by comparing the richness of the world and things there are to talk about with our comparatively impoverished languages. We would hold, however, that it is the distinction between scheme and content which makes the thought that we by creating a richer language would be able to achieve a closer “link” with reality, a more fine-grained mapping of it, etc., so attractive. It is perhaps that same distinction which

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<sup>86</sup> Wittgenstein, §1

helps account for the thought that by *diminishing* language, *removing* vocabulary, we simultaneously diminish our ability to in a substantial way thus latch onto the world. When Orwell and Conant essentially link truth to typically democratic values such as openness and freedom, where “[a] genuine free community is [...] one where vigorous disagreement is welcomed as a spur to refining a shared set of norms”<sup>87</sup>, and say that this kind of openness is not only what drives discourse development but, as we shall look at in more detail later, is central to achieving objectivity, they are, first of all, equating this openness with the expansion and enrichment of our language discussed above, and secondly, claiming that “[the] capacity to make true claims and the capacity to exercise freedom of thought and action are [...] two sides of a single coin”<sup>88</sup>. Thus linking truth to freedom, they are able to hold that the oppression and pervasive control of linguistic practices necessarily lead to the removal of the possibility of talking about things we would like to talk about, in the substantial sense, we will claim, that by removing a certain vocabulary we could lose the possibility of linking up with the corresponding natural kind. By removing or thoroughly reforming the senses of, for example, the realist vocabulary involving “truth”, “facts”, etc., we will lose our ability to make our claims answerable to *those very things themselves* – something external to social mediation, the opinions of our peers, or “the game of giving and asking for reasons”<sup>89</sup>.

Returning to Wittgenstein, we want to claim that his refusal to grant the level of determinacy implicit in the Augustinian view of language does not prevent the appearance of basic representationalist assumptions in his and in Baker and Hacker’s writings. In fact, we take it that an important reason why they believe the notion of nonsense can be construed purely negatively, is that they take *some* level of representational connection between language and the world as a matter of course. When so little is said explicitly about ordinariness and why it works, this is perhaps because some representational connection is simply assumed for the ordinary and specialized language games. When such a connection is assumed, all one needs to show is how we are able to explain, or give evidence for, the statements in such language games, and such explanations could take the form of ordinary reason-giving or references to

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<sup>87</sup> Conant

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Brandom, Robert: *Making It Explicit* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 648

scientific inquiry – in essence something like, or advanced forms of, "regularities of agreement [...] in non-ratiocinative judgments".<sup>90</sup> The language games in which such explanations can be given, presumably, can safely be assumed to "work". No such explanations can be given for the objects of inquiry of philosophical inquiry, however, and so these language games fall outside the bounds of sense.

On the antirepresentationalist view, such discrimination against philosophical language games is unfortunate. Portraying any type of language game as *inherently nonsensical* is a barrier to the development and enrichment of language, and given the interconnectedness of language with the development and fulfillment of interests and goals that we uphold, human flourishing. One could of course say that this does not matter all the while philosophical language games *are* inherently nonsensical. Our contention, however, is that it is the representational assumption which leads to the claim to nonsense, and that this assumption is unfortunate, unnecessary, and should be undermined. As we shall detail, that assumption has proven to have little explanatory force, and is completely robbed of such force on the naturalistic view of human beings we will present. Furthermore, it potentially leads to such unfortunate authoritarian views as those resulting from excessive scientism and other fundamentalist views.

In any case, we conclude from the obscurity of the notion of nonsense, and the fact that ordinariness is only portrayed negatively, that we are given no clue as to our supposed representational abilities, but that these are rather assumed by Wittgenstein – and it is a perfectly ordinary, commonsensical assumption. We have painted a picture of Wittgenstein as concerned with tempering aspirations to exactness rather than with the surgical removal of representational assumptions. Rorty's campaign is in this regard a much more sweeping one. However, we want to portray it as one that not only finds one of its main inspirations in Wittgenstein's thoughts, but also as one that is more easily reconcilable with the naturalistic stance towards human beings taken by both writers. It is time we look at Rorty's own construal of human beings as natural creatures, and the way in which he uses the inspiration

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<sup>90</sup> Colby: "Wittgenstein's Naturalism"

from Wittgenstein, Darwin and others to problematize representation and representational views of truth.

## 10. Rorty's Naturalism

What we are left with – or at any rate what we want to take with us – from the discussion of Wittgenstein, is a general view of human beings as natural creatures involved in a wide range of activities, where language is seen as equally a form of action. While Wittgenstein's solution for keeping things naturalistic is to use basic reaction as a foundation for language games, Rorty's is to acknowledge that we stand in a purely causal relation with the world while insisting that language use is a matter of socialization “all the way down”.

The basic stance is a thoroughly Darwinian one:

The pragmatists, unlike the idealists, took Darwin and biology seriously, and thus had another reason for distrusting the idea that true beliefs are accurate representations. For representation, as opposed to increasingly complex adaptive behavior, is hard to integrate into an evolutionary story. It is hard to imagine that, at a certain point in the evolutionary process, behavioral patterns began to be determined by inner representations, having previously been *determined by mere neurological configurations*. [...] If, as good Darwinians, we want to introduce as few discontinuities as possible into our evolutionary story, we shall reject the idea that Nature has settled on a single input-output function that enables us to represent our environment accurately. For that idea requires that Nature herself has divided up the causal swirl surrounding us into discrete inputs and has adopted a particular input-output function as distinctively hers.<sup>91</sup>

Going along with Darwin, the aim here is first and foremost a negative one, namely showing how truth as representations of reality is hard to fit within an evolutionary story. Granting that our species once lacked what we know would typically call higher human faculties, the difficulty is how to account for the evolutionary emergence of transcendence, so to speak. We are not simply talking about a gradual improvement in an ability to represent, but a sudden change in our mental lives – at one point there supposedly started to exist objective facts of the matter about our beliefs, while previously there did not.

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<sup>91</sup> TP, 20



On the view of the antirepresentationalist, there is simply no good explanation of such an emergence in sight. The goal has to be to find a solution which enables one to paint a picture of linguistic abilities as developing gradually throughout the evolutionary process, and the antirepresentationalist finds such a solution in the philosophy of Wilfrid Sellars. The idea is expressed in terms of intentionality, and turns the familiar intuitions about language on its head. While it is common to see the intentionality of sentences as a reflection of the intentionality of beliefs – that is, to see the apparent ability of sentences to *be about something* in a substantial sense as a reflection of the fact that beliefs have that same ability, the human mind thus having the capacity to stand in a representational relation with the world – Sellars instead held that:

[The] intentionality of beliefs is a reflection of the intentionality of sentences [...] This reversal makes it possible to understand mind as gradually entering the universe by and through the gradual development of language [...] As Sellars sees it, if you can explain how the social practices we call “using language” came into existence, you have already explained all that needs to be explained about the relation between mind and world.<sup>92</sup>

It is relatively easy to construct a story of a gradual increase in complexity of language use throughout human history. With the expansion of social groups, increasingly sophisticated communicative abilities developed through agreement of which noises or signs would signify which things, intentions, etc. Of course, one might think it equally easy to construct this as a story of human beings gradually getting better at representing things in the world rather than simply coping and fulfilling purposes in a more complex manner. While the antirepresentationalist, as we shall see, has no way to argue for the impossibility of this view, he would nevertheless point to the difficulties involved with postulating the representational relation as an explanation of successful communication or the intentionality of sentences or beliefs, namely how to explain the evolutionary emergence of transcendence and, as we now see, how to account for the possibility and evolution of correctness given the vast history and variation of language that must be supposed to have had this representational relation to the world.

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<sup>92</sup> Rorty, Richard: “Introduction”, in Sellars, Wilfrid: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 7–8

The latter problem would presumably be explained by the representationalist as a matter of increasingly fine-grained representation or understanding of the world. In answer to this, the antirepresentationalist would say that it seems too convenient to hold that the world happens to have divided itself into categories and natural kinds corresponding so nicely to the evolution of human languages and the implied hierarchy of coarser-grained to finer-grained representation. Going further along with the representationalist, it could be responded that this is turning things on their heads – it is not that the world’s ontological hierarchical structure happens to coincide with the evolution of human languages, but rather that it is the world’s structure and the causal influence exerted on human beings that explains how the evolution of languages have run its course in the way it has, towards a more fine-grained and sophisticated understanding of the world’s structure.

At this point it might seem like the competition between the representationalist and the antirepresentationalist reaches a stalemate. The matter comes down to what one takes it more likely explains the evolution and function of language. The intuition that what language most fundamentally does is to represent the world – an intuition which seems the only way towards the kind of substantial basis for rationality and objectivity we so desire – is a deeply ingrained one, and it seems only natural to equate the success of using language in certain ways as opposed to others – the successful results of having two plus two equal four rather than five, for example – with the *truth* of those successful bits of language.

Rorty’s story of how this intuition came to take hold is not one we are centrally occupied with here, but deserves mention as it is an important part of the broad cultural-political initiative that is the antirepresentationalist’s campaign to loosen the hold of representationalism. It is a story which explains the appeal of representationalist intuitions not in the regular way – by appealing to its being so obviously true – but as resulting from the influence of a sequence of historically important figures ranging from, amongst others, Plato, through Descartes, to Locke and Kant.<sup>93</sup> Ideas from these philosophers not only remain central to the self-image of much of philosophy to this day, but have defined the history of ideas leading up to and

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<sup>93</sup> This broad-stroke history of ideas is a central preoccupation of Rorty, Richard: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979)

through the Enlightenment, and have taken firm hold of the modern intellectual consciousness.

The ideas contribute to the picture Rorty dubs “our glassy essence”, or “the mirror of nature”. According to Rorty, Plato’s thought that the realm of ideas constituted absolute reality gave us the idea of one ultimate correct description of reality. Descartes, in his *Meditations*, then painted the picture of the human mind as a theater wherein impressions of the world was viewed. These impressions were given content by Locke’s empiricism, whose development of *the idea* as a vehicle of transmission between the world and the mind helped account for proper knowledge of the world. Kant’s idealism, finally, attempted to deal with the question of the contribution of the mind in attaining such knowledge.

This hopelessly short and insufficient portrayal will not do justice neither to the original writers nor to Rorty’s portrayal of them, but will hopefully suffice as pointers to admittedly central ideas in the history of philosophy. We find the story a plausible one of the origins of central intuitions about knowledge and truth, but with some traces of the more unfortunate Wittgensteinian thought that these intuitions refer to *nonsensical issues*, problems which should be dissolved because *unreal*. The necessarily implied delineation of real and unreal problems is not in tune with the antirepresentationalist position, and this implication is one Rorty has later explicitly regretted making.<sup>94</sup> Such implications were found above in the discussion of Wittgenstein, and the way in which antirepresentationalism denies having such implications will be detailed below.

The central point here, however, is that the apparent obviousness of the view of truth as correspondence to, or representation of, the ultimate nature of reality, is perhaps not so obvious after all. This is better expressed as a confusion between something’s being obvious

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<sup>94</sup> “There is a tone of Carnapian scorn in some of my writings [...], and there should not be. I should not speak, as I sometimes have, of ‘pseudo-problems,’ but rather of problematics and vocabularies which might have proven to be of value but in fact did not. I should not have spoken of ‘unreal’ or ‘confused’ philosophical distinctions, but rather of distinctions whose employment has proved to lead nowhere, proved to be more trouble than they were worth. For pragmatists, the question should always be ‘What use is it?’ rather than ‘Is it real?’ Criticism of other philosophers’ distinctions and problematics should charge relative inutility rather than ‘meaninglessness’ or ‘illusion’ or ‘incoherence.’” (TP, 45)

and its being true: nothing about the truth of this view follows automatically from its intuitive appeal. In fact, if the story of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is a convincing one, little *but* the intuitive appeal of the view of truth as correspondence to reality remains. If it is granted, given the above, that the obviousness of these intuitions do not give an indication of their truth, then the representationalist's case seems to be weakened. The conflict between the representationalist and the antirepresentationalist recently discussed was essentially a fight over the order of explanation of linguistic phenomena. The representationalist would like to explain language as conforming more and more with the ontological structure of the world through letting oneself be guided by the world's constraints, while the antirepresentationalist reversed the order of explanation by holding that we need only explain how language developed as a social coping mechanism. It was admitted that the antirepresentationalist could not show the representationalist to be wrong once and for all, but the explanatory force of the representationalist's case is weakened by the plausibility of the claim that nothing about the correctness of his view follows from the force of his intuition.

Even in the face of this, the possibility remains of holding that the nature of belief is such that it tends to conform to the ontological structure of the world imparted through the causal transmissions from the world – as long as one is open and unprejudiced in letting oneself be thus constrained. Nevertheless, this assumption now thoroughly emerges as nothing more than just that – an assumption. The antirepresentationalist's point, that the assumption of truth as representation has no explanatory force left, seems to be gaining the upper hand.

To further support the antirepresentationalist's case, let us look at the representationalist claim that the ontological structure of the world can be imparted to us through our causal interaction with it. While the antirepresentationalist sees no way to demonstrate the falsity of this idea, he is able to carry out his familiar strategy of exposing it as no more than an assumption. Rorty expresses the point as follows:

[We] often let the world decide the competition between alternative sentences [...] In such cases, it is easy to run together the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified

in holding a belief with the claim that some nonlinguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth, or that some such state “makes a belief true” by “corresponding” to it.<sup>95</sup>

Hanne Andrea Kraugerud and Bjørn Ramberg, in their article “Quiet Is The New Loud”, sum up this idea by saying that “[it] is a basic assumption of the ironist that the world does not decide whether the terms we employ are the best ones for us to use.”<sup>96</sup> The ironist is an antirepresentationalist figure, created by Rorty, who combines an awareness of the contingency of even her most deeply held beliefs with an unwavering commitment to furthering the values and institutions she holds dear despite having no faith in any absolute justification for doing so. She realizes, of course, that this entails that she has no firm basis for her belief in such Rortian theses as the contingency of all her beliefs, but faces this blatant circularity without fear. As will be argued, “the pragmatist cannot justify these habits without circularity, but then neither can the realist”.<sup>97</sup>

The attempt to naturalize, say, epistemology is nothing new. Causal theories of reference, for example, attempt to account for representation by looking at how the mind may be able to correctly “sort” the information imparted by the world through causal interaction with it – through perception, for example. A classic problem for such theories is the so-called disjunction problem, which is a problem concerning the determinacy of the content of representations of the world. The question is how to account for the fact that “a representation can misrepresent – how it can represent an object as being something it is not [... We] need to explain how the representation can *correctly* represent some things which cause its activation, yet *misrepresent* other things which cause its activation”.<sup>98</sup> For example, while the mental representation *dog* usually occurs when seeing a dog, it can also be triggered by, say, a cat in certain conditions. We often make mistakes like this. Given the assumption that the mind essentially represents the world, how do we explain such mistakes?

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<sup>95</sup> *CIS*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Kraugerud, Hanne Andrea & Ramberg, Bjørn Torgrim: “The New Loud: Richard Rorty, Quietist?”, in *Common Knowledge*, 16:1 (2010), 60

<sup>97</sup> *ORT*

<sup>98</sup> Dawson, Dr. Michael R.W.: “The Disjunction Problem”, in *Dictionary of Cognitive Science*, [http://www.bcp.psych.ualberta.ca/~mike/Pearl\\_Street/Dictionary/contents/D/disjunction.html](http://www.bcp.psych.ualberta.ca/~mike/Pearl_Street/Dictionary/contents/D/disjunction.html)

This is a problem which owes its existence to the representational assumption, and the assumption “that Nature herself has divided up the causal swirl surrounding us into discrete inputs” – a certain, determinate ontological structure. The antirepresentationalist would say that, unless we assume that dogs are a *natural kind*, or at least in some sense one of the discrete, determinable inputs which nature has divided herself into, there is no such fundamental problem of how to represent dogs accurately, for example. When *no* ontology is assumed, and a purely causal relation between us and the world is insisted on, there is no reason to be bothered by the problem of how we are able, or unable, to represent accurately in this way.

This is not to say that our brains do not sort the information imparted by the world in a systematic fashion and, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of essentially representationalist assumptions, models the environment around us, systematizes our linguistic interactions with others, links those interactions up to the models, etc. Knowledge of these workings is obviously fruitful in a vast range of medical, technological and other endeavours, and equally obviously central to the future of humankind. What the antirepresentationalist protests is not that the brain, *in this sense*, represents the world, but rather the idea that these representations can have, or lack, the kind of objective correctness she sees the representationalist position as assuming on behalf of them. In equal fashion, while she is not denying that the world has a certain structure, she is protesting that there is a way in which *our descriptions* can mirror that structure in a way that can be ascribed the same objective correctness. This does not even amount to denying the fact that the world causes us to have beliefs in a systematic fashion, and that certain things in the world tend to create such-and-such beliefs<sup>99</sup>, but is again only to

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<sup>99</sup> Although this is highly dependent on acculturation, as for example the sight of a car would incite the thought “that is a car” in most people, while others, having never seen or heard of one in their lifetime, might think it some sort of metallic, demonic creature. When Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu held that “a Palestinian state had to be large enough to be politically and economically viable, but added that Israel ‘will not return to the indefensible boundaries of 1967’” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/24/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-palestinians-congress?INTCMP=SRCH>), this would incite general agreement and standing ovation from most US Congressmen, while to others it would signify a condescendingly arrogant attitude, by a state involved in illegitimate territorial occupation, towards both its neighbor and the economic contributor without which it would not be able to assert such an attitude with much force in the first place. But, as the

say that the beliefs or, what comes to the same on the Sellarsian view, descriptions do not correspond to Nature's own categorization of herself:

The problem concerns any putatively (in McDowell's words) "nonconceptualized configurations of things in themselves." Insofar as they are nonconceptualized, they are not isolable as input. But insofar as they are conceptualized, they have been tailored to the needs of a *particular* input-output function, a *particular* convention of representation.<sup>100</sup>

Thus the main moral of the antirepresentationalist story in this regard is that we should not think of correctness as correspondence to Nature's own categorization because this amounts to a confusion of the fact that the world is the cause of (many of our) beliefs with the assumption "that some nonlinguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth". As we are unable to show the impossibility of this view, the attack has rather taken the form of a battle over plausibility, where we attempted to show how the difficulties and lack of explanatory force of the representationalist picture. On our view, the story of how human beings developed increasingly sophisticated methods of coping with their environment and mediating social affairs in order to serve their own and common purposes makes more sense, and is more in tune with a Darwinian picture, than the story of how human beings have progressed towards (and often times swayed from) a more correct and more complete understanding of and representation of the world as it is in itself, and we have sought to substantiate this view.

This has been carried out in a largely negative fashion, by seeking to undermine the representationalist picture. Rorty's positive stance, on the other hand, is taken from Davidson and, although it cannot be discussed in detail here, deserves to be outlined.

Famously, Davidson draws inspiration from Tarski's definitions of truth. An important distinction in that regard is one between determining the truth of a certain expression and showing what can be said generally about truth for a whole language. Roughly, the representationalist might be said to lean towards the first and the antirepresentationalist

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representationalist would be quick to remind us, it would serve our current purposes better if we stuck, for now, to the questions of more direct perception currently at hand.

<sup>100</sup> TP, 36

towards the second. That is, representationalist attempts to account for truth often aim to show directly, for example, how the sentence “there is a horse in the field” is true because there is, quite demonstrably, a horse in the field. Davidson, however, takes Tarski’s definitions to imply nothing about the individual case, but says instead: “What Tarski has done for us is to show in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make. What we need to do now is to say how to identify the presence of such a pattern or structure in the behavior of people.”<sup>101</sup>

So, Davidson shifts the focus from an attempt to show how things in the world make sentences true to an attempt to construct “an empirical theory for explaining and predicting *behavior* [...] The way we identify this pattern is to gather information ‘about what episodes and situations in the world cause an agent to prefer that one rather than another sentence be true.’”<sup>102</sup> This is the basis for Davidson’s theory of Radical Interpretation which, eschewing the distinction between scheme and content, and with it representationalism, describes how we ascribe rationality to (rather than discovering rationality in) other people. Davidson says that this happens if we recognize enough basic overlap in fundamental beliefs as compared to our own beliefs. The level at which this overlap occurs is perhaps most quickly made clear by referring to Wittgenstein’s claim that “[if] a lion could talk, we could not understand him”.<sup>103</sup> We could not understand him because, even if a lion could learn our language, his general outlook and frame of reference would be so fundamentally different from others that we would not be able to recognize a pattern of rationality, or “the pattern truth must make”, in his behavior. This is not saying simply that he would probably have outrageous political views (for some reason a *laissez-faire* neoliberalist caricature comes to mind, but this must be seen as our projection of human types onto the lion rather than the reverse, as that is the frame of reference *we* have at our disposal), but, in Rortian terms, that his socialization would have been so fundamentally different from ours, because his and his peers’ ways of coping with the world had a vastly different evolutionary trajectory from ours, that we could not even begin to understand him.

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<sup>101</sup> Davidson, Donald: “The Structure and Content of Truth”, quoted in *TP*, 22

<sup>102</sup> *TP*, 23

<sup>103</sup> Wittgenstein, 190



So, "a definition given in [Tarski's] way can provide no clue for the next or general case"<sup>104</sup>, and the empirical theory we construct has only to do with whether we can recognize a pattern in the interaction with the world that is similar to ours to a sufficient degree. One way Davidson has criticized Rorty for misappropriating his views is precisely in granting too little significance to this aspect of truth. Rorty describes it thus:

[Davidson] said that he should not be considered neither a deflationist nor a disquotationalist. He defined "deflationism" as the view that "Tarski's work embraces *all of* truth's essential features" and said I was mistaken in attributing this view to him on the basis of his eschewal of attempts to define "true" for variable *L* as opposed to defining "true-in-*L*" for particular values of *L*.<sup>105</sup>

We see that deflationism is here presented as granting no more to the concept of truth than that which Davidson himself says Tarski gave us, i.e., stopping short of the empirical theory needed to detect the pattern of rationality. Although we will not go further with this discussion, but rather stick to portraying the naturalistic picture of the antirepresentationalist, it can at least be said that Rorty is not one to ignore the importance of regarding rationality as a firmly social phenomenon, but is on the other hand hesitant to grant special importance to the concept of *truth*. The main reason for this, however, is the representationalist intuitions that hang so closely together with this notion, and the fear that talk of the special significance of truth might stand in the way, however much the sense of "special" *can* be distinguished from a representationalist construal, of his antirepresentationalist campaign. So, rather than granting special significance to the concept of truth, Rorty prefers to construe things in an explicitly social way: "Explaining rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former, is the essence of what I shall call 'epistemological behaviorism,' an attitude common to Dewey and Wittgenstein."<sup>106</sup> The "behaviorism" part of this label is a nod to Davidson's Radical Interpretation, while including "what society lets us say" is a far from uncontroversial link to the Foucauldian point "[there]

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<sup>104</sup> Davidson: "The Structure and Content", quoted in *TP*, 22

<sup>105</sup> *TP*, 22

<sup>106</sup> *PMN*, 174

is no [...] knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”.<sup>107</sup>

Two main points have been mentioned in order to undermine the case of the representationalist. First of all it was argued that if we are to go along with Darwin’s evolutionary story, which puts human beings on a par with the rest of the natural world in all but complexity, it becomes difficult to explain what was characterized as the evolutionary emergence of transcendence, or a fundamental shift to a situation where “behavioral patterns began to be determined by inner representations, having previously been determined by mere neurological configurations”. Secondly, we pointed out the implausibility of the claim, required by representationalism, “that Nature herself has divided up the causal swirl surrounding us into discrete inputs and has adopted a particular input-output function as distinctively hers”. We attempted, through the typically antirepresentationalist means of undermining confidence in the necessity of seemingly obvious intuitions, to expose the idea that language fundamentally mirrors this ontological structure as a mere assumption on the representationalist’s part which created explanatory problems rather than being explanatorily helpful. We then finally gave a short portrayal of Davidson’s views on truth and rationality which could serve as an alternative for those now post-ontologically inclined.

However convincing the antirepresentationalist strategy has been so far, a number of other different, but related, objections emerge at this point. These are questions that must be dealt with not only in response to the representationalist, but also to further justify the antirepresentationalist’s own position, for he has made a number of assumptions in the above discussion which must be accounted for.

With this, we now move on to deal with a number of criticisms commonly directed at the antirepresentationalist.

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<sup>107</sup> Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, Tavistock, 1977), 27

## 11. Common Criticisms

The antirepresentationalist position is not a particularly popular one. Neither does it claim to be an intuitive one. It has often been ridiculed for being blatantly circular and indefensible, and dismissed as postmodernist relativist nonsense. The situation is complicated by the admission by the antirepresentationalist that, indeed, she does *not* claim to have found the correct story, at least not in the substantial sense of correctness discussed above.

How then does her position even deserve consideration? First of all, it is clear that many of the criticisms commonly made simply misrepresent the antirepresentationalist views. In fact, it is often difficult to find a criticism that thoroughly hits home, that is, one which engages the antirepresentationalist with a good understanding of that position and its motivation at hand. Conant's might be said to be one of those more successful criticisms, but certainly also falters at times. What is particularly interesting about those cases where fruitful engagement with the antirepresentationalist is had, we would say, is the way in which our most basic intuitions are scrutinized, and not least what we would consider the consequences of giving up those intuitions. The previous chapter was in large part a discussion of the basic frameworks on which the two competing positions build their views, and the basic struggle between the insistence on representation in order to account for proper understanding and the insistence that this picture does not fit well with our most basic understanding of ourselves as natural creatures, was brought out.

Throughout the following, we will return to idea of what we will call trajectories of priorities. The term refers to the basic values and practices various philosophers are concerned to defend and support through their work and, importantly, what they see as necessary in order to reach these goals. It is already obvious that many regard representation, or some form of substantial objectivity, as a precondition for properly defending central practices, while Rorty thinks we can do without such a substantial notion.

To decide this question, it is not sufficient to look at the purely philosophical positions detailed above. After all, both camps are able to accommodate a vast range of views on how

one could support the values and practices one wishes to support. Conant and Putnam, for example, insist that their view differs radically from that of the metaphysical realist. Rorty, on the other hand, must remain even more open to new suggestions because of his contingency thesis.

So, the picture needs further nuance, and this nuance is precisely what the disagreement between Conant and Rorty as regards *1984* provides so nicely. Conant and Rorty both agree that O'Brien represents a Rortian coherentism about truth (although it can certainly be questioned whether he honestly holds such a position), but they also agree that he represents a frightening and terrible prospect, and the results of the Party's rule are obviously horrid prospects to both of them. How can Rorty then defend such a position? The interplay between philosophical views, social practices, and the nature of that interplay will be important to scrutinize in this connection. The situation is further complicated by Conant's insistence that he is not in any sense a realist. On this point, we will use our discussion of Wittgenstein to argue that Conant is not innocent of realist, or representationalist, presuppositions. The question remains, however, what is needed to uphold the practices and values that Conant and Rorty, after all, agree are so important. Would they survive a transition to a society where Rortian views were widely embraced? For Conant, they obviously would not, and *1984* more than anything is an illustration of this point on his view. Rorty's position, on the other hand, is far from exhausted by O'Brien's coherentism, and must therefore also be detailed.

Let us begin, however, with looking at some of the most common charges against antirepresentationalism as they pertain to our discussion. We will attempt to frame the criticisms in terms of a series of attacks on Rorty's Darwinian naturalism, as focusing on defending this view against attacks from several angles might further the antirepresentationalist aims of the discussion.

### 11.1 The unbearable lightness of antirepresentationalism.

Central to the attack on representationalism above was the charge that this view was hard to reconcile with a Darwinian view of human beings as natural creatures. On the face of it, this assumes that Darwin was essentially *right* about what human beings are – namely, no more than complicated animals. But that antirepresentationalist persona, the ironist, openly admitted to acknowledging the contingency of all her beliefs. Why should we then take it for granted that a thoroughly Darwinian view of human beings must dictate the discussion? After all, the “Darwinian assumption” was essential for the degree to which the antirepresentationalist gained the upper hand in that discussion. In short, why should we believe what someone who explicitly does not claim a firm, objective basis for their convictions say?

The ironist’s reason for thinking her beliefs contingent is not that she is fickle or lacking in seriousness – a charge made against the ironist by, e.g., Simon Blackburn.<sup>108</sup> Rather, the figure is a reflection of all the previously discussed antirepresentationalist views and of taking these views to show the *uselessness* of positing a substantial notion of representation. The naturalistic framework, the lack of explanatory force, Sellars’ psychological nominalism, etc., all indicate to the ironist not that representationalism is *wrong*, but that it is *explanatorily useless*, and in fact stands in the way of better explanations.

It goes against the grain of common sense to insist that truth does not explain why some of our practices work and why we seem to be able to communicate, for example. That is precisely why the antirepresentationalist spends a lot of her time, as we have done, undermining the seeming necessity of central commonsense assumptions by showing how we might make do without them and how her view seems to fit in better with other, equally commonsensical assumptions and widely held beliefs – of which Darwinian naturalism might count as an instance. This is what Rorty means when he calls his strategy a cultural-political initiative. Not believing in our ability to represent the intrinsic nature of reality, all we *can* do, he says, is launch such initiatives in the hope of persuading others that leaving futile old

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<sup>108</sup> ” Blackburn’s initial charge is that the apparently detached, aesthetic posture of the ironist ‘is only possible for those who can afford to think of their lives as play.’” (Kraugerud & Ramberg, 60)

problems behind might lead somewhere better. The strategy involves comparing concrete advantages and disadvantages of different scenarios in an effort to show that we would gain from following the new initiative.

On the ironist's view, this is how we should view the contributions of important historical thinkers – as suggestions for new things to try in the face of newfound inconsistencies in old theories and practices. That is not to say, as this can be mistakenly interpreted, that these thinkers *intended* their work to be “no more” than such suggestions, or that, in the infamous phrase, they were “doing the same thing as their [...] predecessors”.<sup>109</sup> However, as was discussed above in connection with Orwell's intentions, what one intends one's work to show does not necessarily equal what it will be taken to have actually shown. Without the representational assumption, and with that, the denial that these writers have been more or less in touch with reality, moreover, Rorty's job description for philosophers of “continuing the conversation”<sup>110</sup> or “[weaving] together old beliefs and new beliefs, so that these beliefs can cooperate rather than interfere with one another”<sup>111</sup> is, although of course not necessarily, all that is left.

So, where are we? The antirepresentationalist cannot claim the truth of her Darwinian view of human beings. But on her view, all theory creation amounts to (although, remember, this did not entail that we are out of touch with the world, but only that we not make claims about nature's own classification) is making such suggestions, and so hers is on a par with everyone else's *in this regard*. If nobody is in touch with the intrinsic nature of reality, this is no reason for her to abandon hope in the realization, or *importance*, of her goals and of furthering her cultural-political initiatives. Only if there was a sense in which our social practices relied on foundational philosophical backing would there be cause for despair, and as it turns out, there seem to be no practical differences entailed by dropping such philosophical assumptions. We will return to this point below, but the point here is that the ironist holds “that if something

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<sup>109</sup> Kraugerud & Ramberg, 51

<sup>110</sup> *PMN*, 394

<sup>111</sup> Richard Rorty, “Philosophy and the Future,” in *Rorty & Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. (Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), 199

makes no difference to practice, it should make no difference to philosophy”.<sup>112</sup> In short, while she can see no sense in which “true” helps explain her beliefs about what is good, bad, important, etc., these things still seem urgently good, bad, important, etc., and so she continues comparing and contrasting concrete advantages and disadvantages in the search of new, better solutions. She certainly does not let go of these contrasting terms, but refuses to grant that they need objective backup:

Rorty's position is that we have no notion of rational warrant that exceeds, or transcends, or grounds, the norms that liberal intellectuals take to define thorough, open-minded, reflective discussion. It is chimerical, Rorty holds, to think that the force or attractiveness of these norms can be enhanced by argument that does not presuppose them. It is pointless, equally, to look for ways of convicting those who pay them no heed of irrationality. Persuasion across such fundamental differences is achieved, if at all, by concrete comparisons of particular alternatives, by elaborate description and redescription of the kinds of life to which different practices conduce.<sup>113</sup>

This inability to find, and unwillingness to look for, an objective foundation for one's views, often leads the antirepresentationalist to be charged with self-refuting relativism. Explaining the way in which antirepresentationalism is not happily characterized as a form of relativism might help clarify the ironist's stance.

## 11.2 Relativism

The charge perhaps most often directed towards the antirepresentationalist is that of relativism, of entailing that any view or opinion is as good as any other when there is no objective way to adjudicate between them. The antirepresentationalist meets this charge in a familiar way by holding that relativism is a problem that only arises when we acknowledge representationalism – it is a problem which presupposes the representational assumption.

The antirepresentationalist sees that such relativism would be self-refuting, and one way to state this would be to say: Claiming that “any view is as good as any other” contains an internal contradiction in the use of the term “good”, an essentially contrastive term. Any view

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<sup>112</sup> *TP*, 281

<sup>113</sup> Ramberg, Bjørn: “Richard Rorty”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rorty/>

cannot be as good as any other if “good” itself implies a hierarchy of views. The expression thus robs “good” of its force.

But this view of things, in turn, presupposes the view that truth has one intrinsic nature.

For something to be relative to something else, we need a picture in which the views or opinions in question are somehow discrete entities that can be contrasted against a determinate background – the scheme-content distinction, for example. Only then could there be the kind of objective goodness which would render the above expression self-refuting because failing to adhere to the necessary order of things.

But does Rorty not hold that truth reduces to what our peers will let us get away with? No. He does not *reduce* truth to anything. His ethnocentric view differs from relativism in holding no *positive* view of truth at all, but instead holding that, while we cannot escape our “having been acculturated as we were”<sup>114</sup> – in a sense a relativistic view – we should *drop* the notion of truth as correspondence to reality, which is what leads the relativist into self-refuting trouble. Although we cannot escape our acculturation, this does not amount to “relativism proper” because the representationalist notion that causes the troubled is denied. Rorty proposes the following as one answer to why the charge of relativism is nevertheless so common:

The reason this is called “relativistic” is that the realist cannot believe that anybody would seriously deny that truth has an intrinsic nature, and thus thinks that the pragmatist is *reducing* truth to, e.g., the opinion of some group [...] Not having *any* epistemology, *a fortiori* the pragmatist does not have a relativistic one. The realist is projecting his own habits of thought onto the pragmatist.<sup>115</sup>

We have throughout this text often used the strategy of undermining confidence in the seeming necessity or obviousness of deeply held beliefs or intuitions. So also here. The antirepresentationalist holds *no* positive view of truth despite the realist’s refusal to believe this being possible. We have mentioned several reasons why the pragmatist does not hold such a positive view – mainly because she sees the assumptions implicit in such views as futile and devoid of explanatory force. Another reason why she thinks these assumptions

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<sup>114</sup> *ORT*, 13

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



dispensable is that “antirepresentationalists see no way of formulating an *independent* test of accuracy of representation – no test distinct from the success which is supposedly explained by this accuracy”.<sup>116</sup> This hints at a more explicit version of the claim to explanatory uselessness. We said earlier that “the pragmatist cannot justify [her views] without circularity, but then neither can the realist”. The realist’s circularity is now pointed out. When it is claimed, for example, that something *works because it is true*, the supposed truth is explained through the fact that it worked. This amounts to assuming from the get-go that success entails truth, when this was the thing that needed to be proved. Without an independent test for truth apart from success, the truth of the matter is no more than an assumption.

This rather short way with the realist deserves extended treatment. In that regard, it will be useful to look at two sets of criticisms made by Putnam, as they pertain directly to the little explained ethnocentrist view and to the attempt to view human beings as purely natural creatures. The charges directed at Rorty are those of cultural relativism and of reductive scientism, and thus make more explicit two of the charges mentioned above, those of relativism and of reduction.

### 11.3 Putnam and Cultural Relativism

In its simplest form, relativism is easy to refute. Take the version of it that Richard Rorty, a philosopher who teaches at Stanford, once lightheartedly offered: “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with.” The problem is that contemporary Americans and Europeans won’t let you get away with that characterization of truth; so, by its own standard, it cannot be true.<sup>117</sup>

An interesting version of the charge of relativism often directed at Rorty is Putnam’s characterization of Rorty’s views as leading to cultural relativism. Cultural relativism would be entailed by a view which reduces truth to whatever a certain culture or social group *takes to be true*. That would amount to a reduction of truth to the views of a culture, and such a reduction would again lead to self-refuting relativism, hence “cultural relativism”. For, as the quote which opened this section implies, saying that truth just is the views of a culture

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<sup>116</sup> *ORT*, 6

<sup>117</sup> Holt, Jim: Review of Blackburn, Simon: *Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed*, in *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2005

internally contradicts itself if that culture *does not hold that view of what truth is*. This is made clearer by Rorty's infamous phrase that "truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with". If this was meant as a reduction of truth to what my contemporaries would let me get away with saying, i.e., the view that truth *just is* whatever proves acceptable to my peers, this would be self-refuting all the while my contemporaries would precisely *not* let me get away with this very view of truth – and, indeed, they probably would not.

As has already been discussed, Rorty does not, however, *reduce* truth to anything. The insistence that any view which attempts to deny, or in this case *drop*, the notion of truth as something substantially objective and external to human practices must be a hopelessly reductive one, was diagnosed as the representationalist's projection of his own habits of thought onto the antirepresentationalist because she could not imagine truth *not* having an essential nature.

In his discussion of the possibility of objective values in his "Pragmatism and nonscientific knowledge"<sup>118</sup>, Putnam attributes such a reductive view to Rorty in an instructively explicit way:

Values' being wholly determined by 'our' culture presupposes that the idea of a *common world* is already in place (other people, beliefs, etc). If Rorty were to say that talk of other people is just 'marks and noises' that help *me* 'cope', it would become obvious that his talk of 'the standards of our culture' is empty by his own lights. *Commonsense realism about the views of my cultural peers coupled with anti-realism about everything else makes no sense.*<sup>119</sup>

To begin with, this gives further nuance to the charge of relativism directed at reductive views of truth. If truth just is, or as in this case, values are wholly determined by the views of our culture, then our culture must itself be determinate in order for it to serve as the object of truth. If "talk of other people is just 'marks and noises' that help *me* 'cope'", the status of my peers is left undefined and thus unable to serve as such an object. This interpretation of Putnam is hopefully justified by his characterization of Rorty's view as "[commonsense] realism about the views of my cultural peers coupled with anti-realism about everything else".

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<sup>118</sup> Putnam, Hilary: "Pragmatism and nonscientific knowledge"

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

This portrays Rorty as reducing truth to the views of his cultural peers while pointing out that he is simultaneously failing to give those peers a characterization which would suffice in making their views a possible object of truth.<sup>120</sup>

Once again, this fails to characterize Rorty's intentions for his view. It has been a moral of this text so far that we not take for granted the correctness of what an author *intended* his views to entail. However, we have spent a lot of time attempting to substantiate how the representational assumption is no more than an assumption that itself needs positive clarification, and how this assumption is what accounts for the seeming necessity of truth having an intrinsic nature. So we feel confident that the antirepresentationalist has a strong case when she insists that she is *not* carrying through a reduction of truth but is instead insisting that as long as we have no way of telling whether something is really true apart from success, or apart from the fact that there is wide agreement in something's being true, we shall rest content to have what counts as true be a function of consensus.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Putnam's portrayal is somewhat ambiguous. Why would "commonsense realism about the views of my cultural peers coupled with anti-realism about everything else" (call this "a") necessarily fail to make sense? Putnam's answer is that the coupling presupposes "that the idea of a *common world* is already in place" (call this "b"). Putnam takes what he finds to be a Rortian claim – "talk of other people is just 'marks and noises' that help *me* 'cope'" (call this "c") – to go against "b". This seems initially correct, but the presupposition of a common world does not seem necessary. If we distinguish two meanings of "common world", namely that of a common *world* and that of a sufficient common *structure*, this will perhaps be made clear. On the former view, "a" does not describe the situation Putnam is portraying, while on the latter it does. For if a common *world* is supposed necessary, the situation is not the one portrayed in "a", because a common world entails more than just commonsense realism about the views of my cultural peers. So "a" is more happily characterized as there existing a shared structure between members of a culture which is a sufficient object of truth, while the external world is not – at least verifiably. Any representationalist link to the world here would thus have to be accounted for by the familiar view that while the world contributes to the truth of our views, we do not have ability to access information about how this is so. Finally, while this might have made "a", the combination of realism about the views of my cultural peers and anti-realism about the world, seem *possible*, the substantial contribution represented by the views of my cultural peers turns "a" into a form of *idealism*, in also being responsible for *making up* truth. (At this point the decision was made to turn this into a footnote.)

<sup>121</sup> Rorty suggests three thoroughly antirepresentationalist uses of "true", which shall only be mentioned here. As opposed to the substantial notion of truth, which "is just the reification of an approbative adjective" (Rorty: "Hilary Putnam and the relativist menace"), Rorty proposes an endorsing, a cautionary and a disquotational use of "true" – the first as a way of expressing a strong attachment to a belief, the second because "we need a term such as *true* to express our sense that the possibility of revision applies in principle to all beliefs", and the third as an expression of the Davidsonian claim that a definition of truth serves only to characterize the kind of *pattern* truth must make. (Kraugerud & Ramberg, 57)

There is, however, a more interesting aspect of Putnam's resistance to going all the way with Rorty. It is in essence an alternative formulation of the claim that it does not make sense to reduce truth to the views of a culture, but also points us in the direction of the discussion of how Rorty and Putnam, and with him Conant, can seemingly be so close while nevertheless disagreeing so fundamentally. Here, Putnam's complaint about cultural relativism is voiced in terms of institutionalized norms, and Rorty phrases the issue as follows:

Putnam accepts Davidson's point that, as he puts it, "the whole justification of an interpretative scheme ... is that it renders the behavior of others at least minimally reasonable by *our* lights." It would seem natural to go on from this to say that we cannot get outside the range of those lights, but Putnam draws back from this conclusion because he construes the claim that we cannot do so as the claim that the range of our thought is restricted by what he calls "institutionalized norms," publicly available criteria for settling all arguments, and he rightly says there are no such criteria. But this does not speak to the point the "relativists" [i.e., the antirepresentationalists,] are making. They are pragmatists because they *share* Putnam's distrust of the positivistic idea that rationality is a matter of applying criteria.<sup>122</sup>

This clarifies the sense in which Putnam resists reduction of truth – for him, that amounts to admitting that our thought is restricted by cultural norms. Then it gets hard to explain how dogmatic cultures have managed to develop into modern, open societies, if progress was once dictated by norms seemingly less than conducive to social change. Furthermore, such reduction goes precisely against the grain of some of the most central of *our* cultural norms, or values. Remaining open to new suggestions, avoiding prejudice, etc., is central to our culture's self-image, and so there is again an internal contradiction between the claim that we are restricted by cultural norms and the claim that those norms teach that we be not thus restricted.

This, however, is the point at which Rorty's ethnocentrism distinguishes itself from relativism. When Rorty suggests that we view truth as a function of consensus, he is *dropping* "the notion of applying criteria. Then the notion of 'local cultural norms' will lose its offensively parochial overtones".<sup>123</sup> Ethnocentrism is relativism devoid of the positivist notion of applying criteria. The strategy is the same as before: Attempt to show how the notion of applying criteria, like that of truth as representation of reality, is no more than an unnecessary

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<sup>122</sup> *ORT*, 25

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

assumption made by its defenders, and then corroborate the claim that we can do fine without this assumption. It is perhaps unnecessary to go through the motions once more, so we will instead point to the discussion of representationalism above, and add only the following point specifically regarding the notion of application of criteria:

It is a consequence of the holistic view of knowledge shared by Putnam and the pragmatists that alternative cultures are not to be thought of on the model of alternative geometries. The latter are irreconcilable because they have axiomatic structures, and contradictory axioms. They are *designed* to be irreconcilable. Cultures are not so designed, and do not have axiomatic structures. To say that they have “institutionalized norms” is only to say, with Foucault, that knowledge is never separable from power – that one is likely to suffer if one does not hold certain beliefs at certain times and places.<sup>124</sup>

This is what institutionalized norms looks like when they have been purged of the scheme-content distinction and representationalism, notions which would be presuppositions of any view of cultures as analogous to geometries.

#### 11.4 Putnam and Reductive Scientism

The previous discussion of cultural relativism will now be able to help us with Putnam’s further resistance to go along with Rorty’s view of human beings as no more than complex animals. While this refusal might initially look like no more than despair at the idea that we might not be so special after all, there is more to it than that: “The Darwinian picture strikes Putnam as scientistic and reductionist”.<sup>125</sup> As with the criticism of reducing truth to local cultural norms, only this time in more moralizing terms, reducing human beings to nothing but complex animals struggling for survival puts undesirable limits on the scope of human capabilities, and goes against our fundamental self-descriptions.

Putnam argues that the normative cannot be naturalized, i.e., reduced to notions of, say, biology or physics. He argues: “Let us recognize that [...] one of our fundamental ‘self-descriptions’, in Rorty’s phrase, is that we are *thinkers*, and that *as* thinkers we are committed to there being *some* kind of truth, some kind of correctness which is substantial and not

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *TP*, 48

merely ‘disquotational’. That means that there is no eliminating the normative.”<sup>126</sup> And further, despairingly: “[If] *all* notions of rightness [...] are eliminated, then what are our statements but noise-makings? What are our thoughts but *mere* subvocalizations? [...] Why should we expend our mental energy in convincing ourselves that we aren’t thinkers, that our thoughts aren’t really *about* anything [...]? This is a self-refuting enterprise if there ever was one!”<sup>127</sup>

However, it does not automatically follow, from having as one’s fundamental self-description that one is a thinker, that we are committed to a substantial notion of truth. In discussing those who wish to criticize the substantial view of intentionality implicit here, Putnam is conflating “our thoughts aren’t really *about* anything” and “we aren’t thinkers”. But the two are not equivalent. Nobody wants to argue that we are not thinkers, and one might certainly wish to describe oneself as a thinker without being committed to a substantial notion of truth.

The more important mistake, however, is arguing that, because a commitment to a substantial notion of truth is part of our fundamental self-description, we cannot reduce the normative. This implicitly argues that there is somehow a connection between the normative and the true.<sup>128</sup> Rorty picks up on this conflation, and says: “I think Putnam runs together ‘Can we give nec/suf conditions for the application of normative expressions?’ with ‘Does our familiar use of normative expressions show that there is “some kind of correctness which is substantial”?’”<sup>129</sup> This, it will be argued, is also the mistake made by Conant in his interpretation of Orwell’s views and the significance of *1984*.

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<sup>126</sup> Putnam, Hilary: “Why Reason Can’t Be Naturalized”, in *Synthese*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jul., 1982), 21

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21

<sup>128</sup> As this will be important for the things Conant says about the significance of *1984*, it is worth further corroborating the claim that Putnam believes in this connection between the normative and the true. Rorty finds further evidence of this in Putnam’s book *Words and Life*. “Putnam there criticizes two philosophers whom he construes as disquotationalists – Paul Horwich and Michael Williams – for remaining in the grip of a ‘positivistic picture’ and for being closet reductionists. This is a criticism he has often made of me (see, e.g., ‘The Question of Realism,’ 295-312, in the same volume). On Putnam’s view, all three of us ignore the need to admit the existence of genuine ‘directedness’ and ‘intentionality.’” (*TP*, 21 (note 8))

<sup>129</sup> *TP*, 59

The special significance Putnam grants to normative expressions in linking them with truth, which leads him to claim their irreducibility to materialistic terms, can be described as an acknowledgment that there emerges a *placement problem* for normative expressions: How is it possible to accommodate these two fundamentally different types of expressions? Purely descriptive materialistic descriptions would not seem to be able to encompass the scope of normative expressions, with the special status they are now granted.

Perhaps almost needless to say, the antirepresentationalist is not worried about such placement problems, because she does not see different statements as of fundamentally different kinds as regards their relation to reality. Also having the Sellarsian explanation of the natural development of linguistic abilities available, she “[sees] no problem about the place of norms in a world of fact”.<sup>130</sup> For there to be problem, there would have to be a sense in which different kinds of statements referred to fundamentally different kinds of entities in the world which could not be referred to with other kinds of statements. There is of course no room for such an idea on the antirepresentationalist view, and so placement problems are not questions the antirepresentationalist feels need answers.

There is a point of agreement between Putnam and Rorty here, however, although it is taken to entail different things by the two of them. We are thinking of Putnam’s “naturalistic fallacy” argument, an argument against the possibility of reducing truth to a set of conditions. In short, the argument is “that a given belief might meet any such conditions but still not be true”.<sup>131</sup>

For Putnam, the argument shows the irreducibility of truth, and so also – cf. the above – of the normative. He takes it to show that, in his words, “reason can’t be naturalized”. Because he simultaneously takes our fundamental self-description as thinkers to imply that we must acknowledge some kind of substantial truth, we see how such a thoroughly naturalist construal as Rorty’s becomes impossible for him to accept. But again, this relies on

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *TP*, 21

assumptions about different kinds of statements and about representation that we have criticized.

Even so, the naturalistic fallacy argument is important to Rorty, too. However, he blocks Putnam's inference at an early stage by pointing out that "nothing about the substantiality of correctness follows from the irreducibility of a set of expressions to another"<sup>132</sup>, and so does not accept that the irreducibility of the normative shows that we must give up the project of a naturalist construal of human beings. Instead he points to the Sellarsian conception of language evolution and, as usual, tries to show how this better explains our linguistic abilities while being in tune with Darwinism, whereas granting special significance to normative expressions causes explanatory problems. The moral Rorty draws from the naturalistic fallacy argument, then, is precisely that which Putnam himself thinks we should embrace (though for other reasons): he sees no way of finding criteria the application of which once and for all would be able to settle all arguments.

It must be assumed that some will get from this discussion the impression that Rorty is simply using sneaky rhetoric to usher in his antirepresentationalism, spinning a nice "story" about how it fits in with Darwinism and what have you. In a way they are right. The previous is all a part of Rorty's broader cultural-political initiative to get rid of representationalism, and he is not ashamed to say so. It is important to remember, however, that what motivates this initiative is the recognition of the futility of constructing representationalist frameworks and the hope that there might emerge some positive, practical differences should we choose to drop them. In that sense, it is not of a kind with the strategies of the Party in *1984*, which seems to be pursuing rather simple megalomaniacal goals which nevertheless have far-reaching practical consequences. The reason Rorty can so cheerfully embrace O'Brien's coherentism<sup>133</sup>, is that he sees an attachment to such a theory as having no necessary implications whatsoever for one's practical, political goals or possibilities. The theoretical stance is simply one of denying the usefulness of postulating representationalist relations

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<sup>132</sup> *TP*

<sup>133</sup> "My reading of [Orwell was intended to explain] why one could agree with O'Brien's coherentism and still be intrigued, fascinated and appalled by O'Brien's way of coming to terms with the absence of freedom." (*CIS*)



between language, or belief, and the world, but Rorty sees no reason why this should stop you wanting to spread, and being perfectly capable of spreading, the values and institutions you hold dear – nor, for that matter, why this should have any implications for which values and institutions you do hold dear.

The only thing that might be regretted, is the picture of a “seamless web of language”<sup>134</sup> resulting from the antirepresentationalist’s refusal to acknowledge fundamental differences between types of assertions, or language games. This is an important discussion in its own right, but goes far beyond the scope of this paper. We nevertheless wish to point out that the seamlessness of language *only* pertains to its representational status – here we must insist that there are no objective differences of status between any parts of language. That does not mean that there is no way to conceive of fundamentally important differences between statements and language games within the antirepresentationalist framework. A suggestion by Ramberg for how this might be construed will be presented in the conclusion of this paper.

Let us now turn to a final, common criticism of Rorty, one which in effect is also presented by Conant. That is the charge that Rorty’s view promotes intellectual irresponsibility.

### 11.5 Intellectual Irresponsibility

[The] problem with totalitarian ideas, according to Orwell, is that they aim to bring it about that the sole available standards of comparison are precisely those which Rorty’s Orwell urges are the only ones you should ever want: the standards supplied by the community of “comrades” with whom you express your solidarity. The standards of comparison of which you are deprived [...] are the sorts of standards which are only available to someone whose thought is answerable to the facts themselves.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Blackburn, Simon: “Wittgenstein, Wright, Rorty and Minimalism”, in *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 107, No. 425 (Jan., 1998), 157. The full, despairing, yet hopeful, statement goes as follows: “There is a contemporary river that sometimes calls itself pragmatism, although other titles are probably better. At any rate it is the denial of differences, the celebration of the seamless web of language, the soothing away of distinctions, whether of primary *versus* secondary, fact *versus* value, description *versus* expression, or of any other significant kind. What is left is a smooth, undifferentiated view of language, sometimes a nuanced kind of anthropomorphism or ‘internal’ realism, sometimes the view that no view is possible: minimalism, deflationism, quietism. Wittgenstein is often admired as a high priest of the movement. Planting a stick in this water is probably futile, but having done it before I shall do it again, and – who knows? – enough stick may make a dam, and the waters of error may subside.”

<sup>135</sup> Conant RHC, 294

In our explanation above of how Rorty was able to justify embracing O'Brien's coherentism, we made a point of firmly separating the questions of attachment to a view of truth and of attachment to certain social practices. The present quote brings those two questions right back together in a quite tendentious manner. In this sense it is not the most interesting way to frame the charge of promoting intellectual irresponsibility, but the combination of Rorty's leaning towards O'Brien's coherentism and the striking horridness of the Party's practices, and the instantly nagging question of whether there must not, after all, be *some* direct connection between the two, leaves this nevertheless a good place to start.

We must immediately apologize for having indicated that we now might find there to be some such connection – for we do not. Instead, we think the quote nicely sums up a number of conflations commonly made when criticizing Rorty's views. First of all, the opening sentence of the quote reminds one of the confusion between attachment to a view of truth and attachment to certain social practices. For it is a strange thing to say that it is generally an important aim of totalitarian rulers to introduce a coherentist view about truth. Would it not make more sense to say that they aim to control, normally through oppressive practices? When the Party uses a coherentist view as part of such strategies, we must take care to separate this view from the oppressive practices.

In fact, we want to say that *1984* is very far from as clear an example of Rortian views leading to reprehensible practices as Conant thinks. This is corroborated by the fact that it is quite unclear that O'Brien (who serves as the most visible representative of the Party) in fact holds a coherentist view of truth, other than as a means to control and oppression. After all, the Party holds that in certain practical cases, two and two *have to* make four. This renders it plausible that the use of coherentism is no more than a tactical employment. In what sense, then, is the view of truth necessarily connected with the Party's practices?

Perhaps it is enough to show that *any* scenario in which "adherence to the facts" is left behind necessarily leads to these practices? Contrary to this, we find it more plausible that coherentism itself has no such power to lead to reprehensible practices, but that the oppressive

intentions of those using such a view for their purposes are instead to blame. But does that not show an inherent danger with the coherentist view, namely that it is at least conducive to such practices? This certainly does not follow without further support, but it is a perfectly commonsense reaction – precisely because our common sense is realist in nature. The history of our common sense, and the demonstration of its contingency, was attempted in Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, as discussed above. Rorty himself would serve as an example that simply holding a coherentist view is not inherently connected with the loss of our most valued practices. On the contrary, Rorty thinks dropping *realist* views might instead be conducive to promoting those practices, as his view allows us to promote precisely those practices *we find valuable* without the need for foundational support.

The second point regards the standards supposedly only available to those whose thought is answerable to the facts themselves. First off, we will again refer to the antirepresentationalist's view that as long as no clear method is provided to account for such answerability, we will grant no force to such a claim. How to demonstrate that one's thought is answerable to the facts themselves beyond one's own belief, or claim, or *one's peers acknowledgment* that one's thought is thus answerable, remains unclear.

Yet Conant has an interesting portrayal of what such answerability amounts to, and he speaks of

a shared set of norms for the employment of concepts for describing what happened, and the shared belief that there was a considerable body of *mundane* facts concerning which near-universal agreement could be attained [...] Yet his point here is not the mere Rortian point that a consensus was attainable; it is the Orwellian point that the consensus was not answerable solely to the demand to achieve consensus within a certain community.<sup>136</sup>

First of all, we would reply that the important point here is not about “mundane facts”, but about the shared belief in such mundane facts. This explanation of answerability seems to place more importance on the fact that there was a shared understanding than the objects of this understanding. When Conant attempts to shift this focus by insisting that the important

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<sup>136</sup> Conant, 298

thing was what the consensus was *about*, he instead reveals a misconstrual of a Rortian view, which it is worth clearing up.

Conant is here presenting Rorty as holding that the view of truth as consensus (a non-reductive claim, naturally) means that *we believe something to be true* only when we consensus is achieved – in short, that we “check with our peers” before deciding whether something is true. The ascription of this view by Conant is more explicit in the following:

“The criteria for determining the truth-value of such claims do not require that prior to arriving at a judgment on such matters one consult the latest bulletin from the Party”.<sup>137</sup>

Of course, Rorty does not think that this is the role of consensus. Obviously, unless in a case where one is unsure what to believe, for example, one does not think that truth *relies on* a fact of consensus in this manner – this would only be held by someone who *reduced* truth to consensus, or thought that this was the intention of a Rorty. Even the ironist would have no problem believing strongly in something she knew most, or even all, of her peers would take to be ridiculous. She would know that, given her minority role, she cannot expect to gain a following without a fight, but she would also know that the way to get ahead would be to demonstrate the concrete advantages of her proposals. The role of consensus, then, rather amounts to the practical reminder that something for which there is not a sufficient degree of consensus will not be counted as true. On the other hand, someone who “consults the latest bulletin” is someone who for some reason has been convinced that truth *just is* consensus, so if she is to have true belief she better get in line with majority views, and quick. Compared to this, the ironist can live just fine with being conscious that, because “knowledge is never separable from power”<sup>138</sup>, her minority opinions will not be counted as true unless she is able to convince, through concrete demonstration, a sufficient (or strategic) number of people of their truth.

If this sounds like it is counseling the replacement of truthfulness (what one would call “being answerable to the facts”) with strategic rhetoric, it is because of a confusion between the

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<sup>137</sup> Conant, 300

<sup>138</sup> *ORT*, 26

practical fact that what will be counted as true will in large part be determined by consensus and the belief that people will stop caring about being honest and truthful if they lose the foundational grounding of their beliefs. Contrary to this, the ironist counsels that we acknowledge that, as we have no independent test of truth, we should drop the notion of answerability to something external to human practices, but that this is no reason to stop being truthful, open to new suggestions, etc. There is simply no problem with continuing to believe that good things can come from sticking with such values, but the reason for why we should do so changes, from an assumption that we are *somehow doing something right*, to the comparison of concrete lessons from the past and what one thinks one might expect for the future based on this. Examples of the acknowledgment of contingency have often had unfortunate accompaniment, as for example in the case of Nietzsche, who according to Rorty “ran together his diagnosis of philosophical realism as an expression of fear and resentment with his own resentful idiosyncratic idealizations of silence, solitude, and violence, and we need not repudiate those metaphors which embody, say, Socratic conversation, Christian fellowship, and Enlightenment science.”<sup>139</sup> It is important to continue to insist that the two sides not be run together in this manner.

This leads us to a central point of Rorty’s against Conant, namely, that “[predictions] of what will happen if certain revisions in belief or vocabulary are made are not suitable candidates for *demonstration*”<sup>140</sup>. This is a reply to Conant’s claim that there are necessary connections between the vocabularies in question and possibilities of social practices to rise or fall.

## 12. Necessity

We have already discussed in somewhat detail the fact that Conant, and perhaps Orwell, think there are such necessary connections. Furthermore, we have said a lot to corroborate the antirepresentationalist suggestion that we stop talking about truth as correspondence to reality – and with this any claim to necessity is weakened. Finally, we referred to example which showed that it was important not to conflate theory and practice, for example regarding the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>140</sup> Rorty: “Response to Conant”

claim that O'Brien's coherentism was somehow linked directly with, or even a cause of, his reprehensible practices.

If these points have not been convincing, we regrettably have to say that we have little more to offer, and so choose to move on to detail a strategy – intended or unintended – which allows Conant to make more plausible his claim about necessity. That strategy allows Conant, through the rather unfavorable portrayal of Rorty, to point out perceived inconsistencies in Rorty's view. Let us then begin with how Rorty's position is reconstructed by Conant.

The way in which Conant seeks to exhibit the necessary connections between vocabularies and social practices, is to “demonstrate that [Rorty's] way of rejecting philosophical problems does not enable us to care about the very sorts of goods we would like to care about”.<sup>141</sup> Unfortunately this attempt contains within itself, from the start, the seeds to its own destruction.

Conant aims to show the necessary connections between a vocabulary and certain social practices. Unfortunately, he implicitly ascribes the very view he wants to prove to *Rorty*, when he describes Rortian liberalism: “One does not have a moral status by virtue of certain objective properties. A moral community is forged rather than found, moral status acquired through a cultural process, through participation in *certain kinds of* communities which have evolved vocabularies which *enable one* to engage in moral deliberation”.<sup>142</sup> Again one ascribes a reductive view to Rorty, and this enables one to continue to insist on necessary connections, only this time – for Rorty, it is assumed – with a social foundation. Giving up the link to the world, one's foundationalism is simply moved over to the social sphere, but of course Rorty's view is not happily characterized in this reductionist way.

Nevertheless, against this background, Conant proceeds to say that,

Rorty's strategy for dissolving philosophical problems is a wise one *only* if the *sole* function of the vocab in which realist theses are formulated is to enable such theses to be formulated. If

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<sup>141</sup> Conant

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

there are *other discursive possibilities*, whose availability *depends upon* the availability of that vocabulary, then a pragmatist has no business enjoining us to jettison that vocabulary unless he can first demonstrate to us that the loss of those other discursive possibilities is vastly outweighed by the gain of rendering ourselves immune to the temptations of realism.<sup>143</sup>

Again, construing necessary connections between vocabularies and practical possibilities in this way only works against a background which grants the representationalist picture, involving natural kinds which can be represented. The antirepresentationalist, echoing the Sellarsian reversal of familiar explanations of language, calls this simply an unfortunate hypostatization of language, i.e., the assumption that sentences are true by “embodying” things in the world in some sense, and we have already argued against the usefulness of such a view. It does not matter whether what one takes language thus to embody are things in the external world or the social world – the problem is the embodiment itself. When this idea is retained in Conant’s construal of Rorty’s view, he is arguably unable to get his criticism off the ground.

What could Conant’s criticism have looked like had he not made this unfortunate ascription to Rorty? The antirepresentationalist is stuck thinking that *some* substantial link, which in turn entails embracing a certain ontology to account for this substantiality, is necessary to make the claim Conant is attempting to make. Contrary to this, Rorty holds that “[predictions] of what will happen if certain revisions in belief or vocabulary are made are not suitable candidates for *demonstration*”. Again he is appealing to the futility of insisting on necessary connections when demonstration of the consequences of vocabulary change, after all, is not possible until after we have seen the results. This leads Forster to dub the position we are arguing against, “retrospective realism[, because it] converts the eventual outcome of investigation into an antecedent reality”.<sup>144</sup>

We thus continue to resist the positing of necessary connections between vocabularies and possible social practices. We would have liked to give this further nuance by discussing the substantial relations Conant sees as holding between totalitarian practices and the loss of

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Forster, Paul D.: “What Is At Stake Between Putnam and Rorty?”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sep., 1992), 595

truth, and between democratic practices (openness to new ideas, welcoming discussion as conducive to progress) and the achievement of truth. However, this will have to be left behind by saying only that we remain doubtful about the usefulness of positing those necessary connections as well. It would seem that the claim that democratic attitudes are conducive to truth, in a substantial way, is equally guilty of the charge of being reductive and of having only retrospective explanatory power, while the antirepresentationalist sticks to her usual comparison of concrete advantages and disadvantages and hopes that upholding those democratic attitudes will lead somewhere she will think good.

Finally, we must take a quick look at how Conant attempts to use his essentially Wittgensteinian view to show the preciousness of the vocabularies he wants to guard against Rorty's incursions. In this connection, he talks about philosophers "who wish to refer to the possibility of a perspective on our practices that is neither Realist nor anti-Realist".<sup>145</sup> In between those two positions, Conant attempts to establish a middle ground which, while not being a form of realism, nevertheless is able to account for substantial notions of objectivity and rationality. Specifically, he again attempts to account for necessary connections between vocabularies and practices through what looks very much like a Wittgensteinian view equating meaning with use. This essentially serves as a shortcut for establishing the necessary connections, if it is granted that the discussion of Wittgenstein above was able to show how the view is not innocent of representationalist presuppositions deserving of criticism. Given our construal of the Wittgensteinian position we are attributing to Conant, his middle ground position ends up equally guilty of representationalist assumptions while only dropping the middle man – the representationalism becomes implicit in the view of meaning as use instead of explicit as it would be on a realist view. This thus amounts to another conflation of theoretical and practical aspects, and even more opaquely so because, as we saw in the discussion of Wittgenstein, we are told little about everydayness, so this becomes a rather unhelpful notion in accounting for, say, the positive notion of answerability to the facts.

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<sup>145</sup> Conant, note 11



It is time to move into the final section of this paper, in order to look at how the differences between Conant and Putnam on the one hand, and Rorty on the other, while seemingly rather small, nevertheless leave them unable to come to a fundamental agreement.

### **13. Conclusion**

Now that we have discussed in detail a number of disagreements between those three most central writers, it might have come to seem that they are not so close together as it was first suggested. However, consider the fact that we time and time again have mostly returned to the same culprits and solutions – in a nutshell, the notion of representation and the suggestion that we drop that notion, for various reasons. This suggests that there is one main area of conflict, and so the question becomes: why this particular area?

We want to suggest that we see this in terms of what we dubbed priority trajectories: a reference, again, to the basic values and practices various philosophers are concerned to defend and support through their work and, centrally, what they see as necessary in order to achieve those goals.

While Conant's claims complicates the situation by claiming to *not* be a realist and attached to substantial notions of representations, we spent a significant amount of time arguing that he was not able to escape such notions. If that was successful, we are left with the possibility of saying that Conant and Putnam both refuse to let go of objective notions of rationality and correctness, while Rorty preaches the good that he hopes will come precisely from letting those notions go. When Conant and Putnam refuse to do this, we hold, it is because they see no way for our central values, practices and institutions to survive in a Rortian world. They do not see how we can do without these substantive notions if we are to have, say, "freedom proper". Rorty recognizes this intuition as perfectly commonsensical, and expresses it like this, along with his hope for how he might come around it: "Part of the instinctive resistance to attempts to reduce objectivity to solidarity is the fear that our liberal habits and hopes might not survive the reduction. I think that putting the issue in social/political terms rather than

metaphysical/epistemological terms makes clearer what is at stake.”<sup>146</sup> That is the essence of his lesson that we stick to demonstrating practical differences when choosing the direction of our behavior. He hopes that, through enough such practical demonstration, people will come to see of what little use the insistence on substantial notions of truth, etc., is.

What is more, this strategy has the explicit aim of promoting anti-authoritarianism – the view that we not bow down to any external authority in choosing how to develop our societies. In this regard, an excessive belief in science as discoverer of truth is seen as equally authoritarian as, say, religious faith. Given acceptance of the antirepresentationalist claim that there is no independent test of objective correctness, the assumption that science discovers the truth by describing the world correctly becomes, again, only an assumption with little use. The antirepresentationalist prefers to look at science as mainly an instrument of prediction and control of nature – instances of the practically discernable uses of scientific inquiry. Again, for those now screamingly making accusations of irrationality, we find the lesson that we should not think of nature as having her own descriptions of herself especially helpful in reminding us that one is not here denying our causal interaction with the world, only the view that there is a final set of ultimately correct descriptions, or some such view. Ramberg sums this up nicely:

The pragmatist’s skepticism toward metaphysics is that the historical project of epistemology is representationalist in nature, fostering the regulative idea of a *chief vocabulary*, a hierarchy of forms of description, which would be independently authoritative, and final. Pragmatists go after this idea wherever they find it, because they think it sells human freedom short by diminishing our participation in, and thus *willingness and ability to take responsibility for*, any particular rendering of our relations to the world, to each other, and to ourselves. We don’t doubt that the world constrains us in intransigent ways, but only the fruitfulness of the pursuit of a final, independently authoritative account of the general structure of such constraint.<sup>147</sup>

We have spent most of our time undermining confidence in the necessity of the realist’s, the representationalist’s, and other figures’ views precisely in order to show how one might do fine without those views. We would now like to conclude by pointing the way ahead to how the antirepresentationalist camp might construct a positive framework on its own, one which

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<sup>146</sup> *ORT*, 28

<sup>147</sup> Ramberg, Bjørn: “Method and Metaphysics”, forthcoming

would, amongst other things, relieve the regret expressed above about the seamlessness of language seemingly the result of antirepresentationalism. If it may be permitted, we will end with a quote from the conclusion of Ramberg's contribution to *Rorty and His Critics*<sup>148</sup> – a paper which incites something as uncommon as concessions from Rorty – which opaquely yet succinctly details how one might conceive of significant linguistic differences while keeping authoritarianism at bay once antirepresentationalism is fully embraced (and in the process touches upon most aspects of this paper), and thus provides a corrective to Rorty's firm stance which might incite some to come to find the appeal of antirepresentationalism to have grown just a little bit:

Even if we accept my next point, that normativity, on Davidson's story, figures in a distinctive manner in the vocabulary of agency, it is hard for Rorty to see why we would want to say that this confers special philosophical status on the subject of that kind of talk. I then suggested that this is difficult only if we retain the idea that philosophical accounts of vocabularies are attempts to do ontology – that is to say, to distinguish and offer criticism of or warrant for descriptive strategies by appealing to the way the world is. But to give up on ontology is also to give up the idea that philosophical theory performs this function. We should instead take our cue from Rorty, and develop a conception of philosophy that fully integrates the vocabularies-as-tools metaphor. Once we do that, however, it is no longer true that vocabulary-reduction can have no philosophical interest. What is true is that reductive efforts as such have no *intrinsic* philosophical interest. But whether reductive or anti-reductive proposals matter to us as Rortyan philosophers depends entirely on what the particular vocabularies – the tools – in question are for. I suggest we construe a philosophical account of a vocabulary of the sort that Davidson offers as precisely an attempt to say what some vocabulary is *for*. Now any such specification is a redescriptive exercise of the sort that Rorty recommends, urging a particular way to conceive of ourselves, and thereby urging a particular way to structure our causal dispositions. What sort of warrant can we give for the particular proposal Davidson offers, that we cast the vocabulary of agency around norms of rationality? The point of the proposal, as I take it, is to foster a conception of what we are doing that preserves our sense of ourselves as creatures with purposes that are not exhausted by prediction and control. The point is to show that we have a way to talk about ourselves, that there are truths about us that matter, subjects of fundamental concern, that are not truths of explanatory theory. The point of this, in turn, is to strengthen those aspects of ourselves that make us less compliant in the face of steadily-expanding, homogenizing, technocratic managerial forms of social organization.

Now, these kinds of considerations are just the sort that should matter to you if you take seriously the idea of the priority of democracy to philosophy. How do we decide whether they are convincing or not? Like all metaphilosophical argument, this one bottoms out in hunches about how pursuit of some descriptive strategy will effect how we live. [...] But whether the proposal is a good one or not is a matter we can settle only by existentially experimenting with it; it is, as Rorty would insist, something that only experience will reveal.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ramberg, Bjørn: "Post-Ontological Philosophy of Mind: Rorty versus Davidson", in RHC

<sup>149</sup> Ramberg RHC, 367-368

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